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BRINGING FRAMES INTO FOCUS: READING MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Jeffery G. Stoyanoff

August 2015

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Jeffery G. Stoyanoff

2015

BRINGING FRAMES INTO FOCUS: READING MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

By

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Approved July 10, 2015

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ABSTRACT

BRINGING FRAMES INTO FOCUS: READING MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

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August 2015

Dissertation supervised by Professor Danielle A. St. Hilaire

Middle English readers were critical readers who expected rhetorically-sophisticated texts. Middle English authors, who were themselves trained as readers first, acknowledge such a readership by using a variety of framing devices within their texts. The reading techniques that students applied to classical texts in the classroom were beginning to be applied to the then-modern texts of Middle English authors. Authors use these generically-situated framing devices to play with readers' expectations and to open up their texts for a number of possible interpretations. I elucidate the possible rhetorical moves authors make using framing devices in their texts in response to this way of reading in order to demonstrate an understanding of reading-as-interpretation with which the Middle English authors discussed here were intimately familiar. This study accomplishes this end by analyzing three types of framing devices within their respective

texts: the circular frame in John Gower's compilation, *Confessio Amantis*; the episodic, memory-based frame of contemplative writing in Margery Kempe's *Book*; and the narratorial frame accomplished through narratorial tags in *The Romaunce of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*. All of these frames control the presentation of the text while implicitly recognizing that such ornamentation cannot, ultimately, control interpretation. These three examples of framing devices in particular demonstrate the variety of such devices and the vastness of readers' expectations to which they may respond. Ultimately, this study proposes the need to embrace medieval reading practices in order to begin to understand the complicated (and continuing) influence of these rhetorical practices on reading, writing, and interpretation. I contend that meaning is neither author- nor reader-dependent, but rather meaning results from a textual dialogue between author and reader, which may be identified through the framing devices studied here.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Jeff and Marcia, who have supported me throughout this long journey; to all of my teachers and professors who taught me how to love reading and critical inquiry; and to Jason who grounds me and everyday reminds me of the meaning of love.

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I also must thank two of the most influential figures in my life as a graduate student at Duquesne: Anne Brannen and Bernard Beranek. Anne taught me that it was acceptable to love medieval literature for what I loved about it, and she guided me through a tumultuous period of my life with kindness and grace. Bernie, may he rest in peace, taught me the importance of knowing history and the past in order to inform our current work, and he shared with me anecdotes, knowledge, and a deep appreciation of books – all of which I will cherish.

Additionally, I wish to thank my writing-group colleagues over the years – Ian Butcher, Jade Higa, Rachel Luckenbill, Jo Sullivan, Cheryl Read, and David Young – all of whom read numerous drafts of these chapters and patiently provided invaluable feedback.

Finally, I want to thank my family: my grandparents for making me believe that I could do anything I put my mind to, my parents for instilling in me the value of education and the necessary work ethic to complete this project, and my brother for stoically supporting me and my work. I owe more than thanks to my wonderful partner, Jason, who has been a bastion of support, love, and encouragement even in my darkest hours.

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Introduction. Wisdom and Eloquence: The Commentary Tradition and Middle English Reading Practices

“Wisdom without eloquence does little good for states, while eloquence without wisdom often does positive harm.” – Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.I

I begin this introduction with Cicero to make a point concerning presentation and interpretation. Cicero’s point that eloquence must be paired with wisdom in order to have a positive effect on its listener (or reader) is crucial to this project. In this statement, Cicero demonstrates the power of rhetoric in both its constructive and destructive uses. Words are powerful, but the one using the words directs that power. In his twelfth-century commentary on *De inventione*, Thierry of Chartres takes up Cicero’s argument, providing what amounts to a close reading of the text. However, the ways in which Thierry presents this text gets us to the point. In his prologue to his commentary, Thierry posits, “concerning the book of Tully that we are about to expound, two things are to be considered: what is the author’s own intention and what is the utility of the book” (412). Thierry implies his authority here by explaining how one may come to understand the meaning of Cicero’s text. Because Thierry is the one explaining the text, moreover, Cicero’s text becomes *Thierry’s* interpretation of Cicero’s text. This move (of course, not uncommon) locates meaning with the reader rather than with the text or with the text’s author. Rita Copeland has established this act of translation as a “[form] of rhetorical invention” (151).¹ Such an act is, in essence, critical reading, and all of the authors

¹ The history of translation as rhetorical invention begins with Augustine. Copeland addresses this important change in *inventio* at length in Chapter 6 of *Rhetoric, Translation, and Hermeneutics*: “Augustine . . . gives *inventio* a new application by changing the field of its operations to written discourse. In Augustine’s program, the text itself has become the *topos* – the region of argument – from which what has to be said will be extracted (156). She then argues, “The most important implication of this shift for later historical norms of invention is that Augustine transforms the *modus inveniendi* in to the *modus*

discussed in this introduction from commentaries through treatises engage in this act as they create new texts. Thierry was not the first to present a commentary on a text, but his exemplarity, his innovation, and his attention to the literary nature of the text will come to both influence and determine the approach, execution, and goals of commentaries (and therefore reading) in the later Middle Ages in Western Europe. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter discuss Thierry's influence in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric* at length. Of particular importance, they note, "Thierry's commentaries are also a turning point for clarification of Ciceronian rhetorical precept and for appreciating its application to all kinds of discursive skills," and later, "Thierry's discussions of the genres of narration, the levels of style, and stylistic ornamentation give us a clear indication of how Ciceronian rhetoric began to be adapted to literary interests and the teaching of literary composition during the twelfth century" (408, 410).

Thierry's commentary, if only indirectly, is a momentous occasion for literary study, demonstrating that interpretive power lay, ultimately, with the reader. *Bringing Frames into Focus: Reading Middle English Literature* begins with this same realization as its premise for understanding why authors begin to use a variety of framing devices in, particularly, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England. John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Margery Kempe's *Book*, and *The Romaunce of Sir Beves of Hamtoun* all use types of framing devices in what I argue are attempts to control the ways in which readers read while realizing that such devices cannot ultimately control interpretation. These attempts to control readers' interpretations are, in a way, an authorial response to the

interpretandi" (156). Augustine demonstrates how interpretation becomes a mode of invention. In this introduction, I am tracing in particular how Thierry marks the starting point of applying such a mode of invention through his commentaries. As the commentary tradition progresses, the translation (interpretation) of the source text gives way to invention of original texts based either loosely on the source text or inspired by the source text.

changing reading practices that begin with the commentary tradition of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in medieval Western Europe. Authors demonstrate in this way their awareness of readers' influence in creating meaning from a text, and although these framing devices attempt to exert control, they equally mark the sense of interpretive play common for Middle English literature. Meaning, at any rate, is created in the act of reading of the text, and the framing devices employed in these texts exist to guide readers to *an* interpretation. Whether they succeed is less important for this project than documenting how they operate.

The Commentary Tradition and Its Influence

To begin, I include a brief survey of the commentary tradition that comes to play such a large role in the process of reading and interpretation in the later Middle Ages. An entire project could be devoted to merely a few of these commentaries (and there are monographs that already have been). My purpose here is to provide a sketch of the situation that eventually culminates (in part) in the writing and reading practices upon which my project focuses. In their seminal work, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, Copeland and Sluiter begin:

Whether one was to approach texts from the perspective of a poet or an exegete, whether the texts to be considered were secular or sacred, whether one was to compose a text or teach others how to compose, an education in the principles of grammar and rhetoric was the entryway into literary thought. But more than just the point of entry, these arts constituted the abiding theoretical toolbox for anyone engaged in a life of letters. (1)

This commentary tradition influences both compositional and interpretive practices throughout the later Middle Ages in Western Europe. The commentary tradition provides a model of rhetorical practices that one-day authors studied in school. Copeland and Sluiter remark that these grammatical and rhetorical practices were a “basic component of pedagogy at almost every level” (1). These pedagogical practices find their way into writing practices, too. Copeland posits that Augustine (particular in *De doctrina christiana*) makes the way for this possibility:

Where Augustine’s transformation of invention and of the application of rhetoric does have a manifest effect is in two fields which are intimately related: hermeneutics and the *artes poetriae* or rhetorical poetics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Augustine’s definition of invention as an exegetical procedure is a prototype for one important conception of invention in late medieval rhetorical poetics But in these rhetorical poetics, *inventio* can often assume the existence of a textual legacy, an inherited tradition of written authority which will provide a topical reserve. (*Rhetoric, Translation, and Hermeneutics* 159-60)

I emphasize Copeland’s point about invention as an exegetical procedure because the commentaries that she references are nothing but exegetical procedure. They model a specific type of close reading analysis that will come to influence reading practices of both authors and readers. But perhaps the crucial point here is that authors are initially trained to read in a certain way through these works; as a result, they have a particular idea of reading in mind as they create their own texts. Recognizing how readers create

meaning inevitably leads to authors playing with the textual apparatus that affect reading practices.

The ways in which authors of commentaries read the inherited classical treatises on grammar and rhetoric presents the interpretation itself as a new text: the reader creates a different text than the original in the process of reading. Reading, in this sense, is generative because it creates a new text through commenting on an older, source text. Copeland and Sluiter define the relationship between grammar and rhetoric: “the grammatical orientation can be said to define what poets do in terms of the standards of what is truth and what is fiction; the rhetorical model presents a complementary vision of how poets accomplish their aims, in a generative sense” (35). In short, grammar provides categories, and then rhetoric provides method. Cicero provides the bulk of rhetorical subject matter for the commentators of the twelfth century. As James J. Murphy observes, “Usually ‘Tullius’ (Marcus Tullius Cicero) was portrayed as the ultimate master of the theory of discourse, even by authors who probably never read his rhetorical treatises” (89). If authors did not read Cicero’s treatises directly, though, it seems likely that they came to know his texts through the commentaries.² Thierry of Chartres commentary on Cicero’s *De inventione* (mentioned earlier) provides the first example of readers becoming authors in the process of interpretation. He begins his commentary, “It is well known to all that the art of rhetoric is good in itself, but it brings many bad things to men if bad people abuse it” (417). This line is of course a close derivative from Cicero’s own opening. As Thierry continues his commentary, he includes Cicero’s text as he interprets, providing a close reading analysis:

² Murphy addresses this at length in Chapter 3 of his book.

In using the word TROUBLES, which usually means lesser injury, and ANCIENT MISFORTUNES, that is, not new, and NO LITTLE PART OF THE DISASTERS, in using terms, I suggest, he [Cicero] sufficiently attenuates that side of the argument which seems to pertain to the censure of rhetoric, but through MEN OF ELOQUENCE, so that it is not to the art, but to someone abusing the art that he attributes guilt. (418)

In Thierry's commentary, we witness the act of interpretation as it happens – he provides for his reader a model of how to read. He provides a close reading process – essentially explication – in the passage above, parsing Cicero's text into phrases and/or words that he then goes on to explain. Thierry's act of reading becomes an act of invention, as Copeland posits above. Thierry creates a new text in explicating Cicero's original text. This practice continues with other commentators, but the citation of the original text becomes less frequent, favoring instead the interpretation of it as presented by the commentator.

Eventually, the commentator's text takes precedence over the text on which he comments, presenting his own views equally alongside those of the *auctor*. With Petrus Helias's *Summa super priscanum*, we see more clearly this shift away from citing the original text to instead focusing on the commentator's rendition of the text. Copeland and Sluiter note, "Thus the *Summa* can be read, without having to consult either Priscian or any other predecessor, as a continuous exposition of grammar. This new genre, the *summa*, became an instant success: it is the standard textbook form of the later twelfth century (445). Turning to Petrus Helias's commentary on Priscian's *De regimine*, we see an example of the commentator eclipsing the *auctor* on whose work he comments.

Discussing a grammatical construction – “*bonum est nos hic esse* ‘it is good that we are here’” – Petrus Helias remarks,

Here *nos* is in the accusative case and the question is by what it is governed. Some maintain that *nos* is in the accusative case here and that it is not governed by anything. For just like the ablative is sometimes used absolutely, so too is the accusative. However, what an absolute accusative would be, I’ve never found in Priscian. But because Priscian looks into the differences between constructions and never sets out this construction of the accusative among them, therefore I cannot assent to those people.

(460)

Petrus Helias eventually comes back to Priscian’s opinion in his discussion of the text, but initially he relies on his own analysis of the excerpt, then he comments on what *others* have said, and only then does he return to Priscian’s understanding of the issue. We can see that commentaries, in the form of the *summa*, have begun to overtake the texts they discuss.

The forms of commentaries begin to change, and at the same time medieval authors begin to take up the treatise genre to discuss these ancient (classical) issues. An especially important treatise for this project is Dominicus Gundissalinus’s *De divisione philosophiae*, which “shows Arabic influence” in its dealings with poetics (Copeland and Sluiter 462). The Arabic influence in Gundissalinus’s work stems from Al-Farabi in particular. James J. Murphy notes, “Al-Farabi’s commentary on the *Rhetorica* of Aristotle proceeds from the basically Aristotelian premise that all the arts of discourse should be considered together, as aspects or branches of the same *ars sermocinalis* (91).

In other words, in the Arabic model, poetics finds itself in conversation with rhetoric and grammar. Gundissalinus's work is especially important in this regard because it "tries to reconcile Arabic and Latin sources" (Copeland and Sluiter 462). Gundissalinus remarks, "The genus of this art [poetics] is that it is part of civil science, which is part of eloquence. What delights or edifies, whether in terms of knowledge or of morals, plays no small part in civil matters" (478). This categorization of poetics as a civil science changes the ways in which it may be used. By presenting it thus and by joining it with rhetoric and grammar, Gundissalinus (with John of Salisbury discussed below) prepares the way for the surge of arts of poetry that come to absorb both grammar and rhetoric moving into the thirteenth century.

While Gundissalinus elevates poetry to equal status with rhetoric and grammar, John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon* begins the move that will lead to poetry surpassing both rhetoric and grammar to become the preeminent end of both. When he comments, "Begging leave of all, however, I venture to opine that poetry belongs to grammar, which is its mother and the nurse of its study" (497), we can see that even though John qualifies poetry as part of grammar, he advocates that grammar's use is to nurse our understanding of poetry. A thorough understanding of rhetoric and grammar, in fact, are necessary for one to be able to write and to read poetry. John adds after a discussion of Augustine, "Consequently one must learn to discriminate between what is said literally, what is said figuratively, and what is said incorrectly, if one is ever easily and accurately to comprehend what he reads" (498). Here, John places the onus of interpretation on the reader. This move furthers the trajectory set in the commentaries discussed above: reading poetry creates its meaning. Now, as he makes clear, John expects a skilled and

learned reader of poetry, too. But John's elaboration in the next chapter clarifies this relationship between writer and reader:

It is especially necessary to understand those three things which are generally most to blame for blocking comprehension of meaning, namely *schemata* together with rhetorical tropes; sophisms which envelop the minds of listeners in a fog of fallacies; and the various considerations which prompt the speaker or writer to say what he does, and which, when recognized, make straight the way for understanding. (499)

John continues his insistence on both a wary and educated reader – his rationale for the learning of such issues – but he also marks the faults of an author for using these three things. This relationship between writer and reader establishes interpretation as a dialogue between the two, but more than that, it expects that the author follows certain rules that the reader, too, knows. Meaning cannot be conveyed if one or the other strays from agreed rules within rhetoric and grammar. The *Metalogicon*, then, marks what Murphy describes as “a watershed in European attitudes toward the arts of discourse” (129). He discusses the split of the text between the first half's “Quintillianistic spirit”³

³ I do not go into detail in this introduction discussing Quintillian's major work, *Institutio oratoria*, because it is worth mentioning for this project only insofar as its absence from the second-half of John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* marks the significant change in rhetoric, grammar, and poetics as the twelfth century gives way to the thirteenth. Murphy explains the fate of the text:

The dichotomy of attitude so implicit in the *Metalogicon* may give us a clue to the medieval fate of Quintillian's *Institutio oratoria*. The *Institutio*, after all, is really a work with three major parts. The first part, comprising Book One and the first ten sections of Book Two, is a treatise on the education of an orator. The whole middle of the book, running from Book Two up through a part of Ten, is a treatise on rhetoric. The remainder of Ten and final two books are a general set of reflections on style, the social role of the educated orator, and such matters. It is easy enough to understand what happened to each of the three sections after the middle of the twelfth century. Since the education portion seemed to cover teaching methods which were also common to medieval grammatical practices, this part of the *Institutio* had little to recommend it as a separate work. The rhetorical works of Cicero covered in much shorter compass the material included in the middle part of Quintillian, and so they preempted the attention that might otherwise have

and the latter half's "'scholastic' attitude," concluding that the shift in the focus of the latter half of the *Metalogicon* demonstrates "the new admiration for the dialectical control of discourse" (129-30). This dialectical control will feature prominently in the arts of poetry that follow, and it is this specific element of poetics that will result, eventually, in the framing devices under consideration in this project.

The Arts of Poetry and Looking Forward

By the middle of the twelfth century and moving into the thirteenth century, the topic of treatises shifts from grammar and rhetoric to poetics. This turn begins in schools and with students practicing *enarratio poetarum* – literally "commentaries of poets" – to learn how both to read and to write.⁴ Susan Reynolds elaborates,

Reading the poets (*enarratio*), whether in the form of paraphrase, the *accessus* or the study of figurative language, was the site of what we might term a disciplinary contest between grammar and rhetoric, a contest for privileged access to the *auctores*. For rhetoric, the reading of authoritative texts had the aim of producing discourse; while, for grammar, understanding what had already been written was the means of ensuring competence in the Latin language itself. (22-23)

This disciplinary contest seems to become more complicated with the introduction of poetics into the mix; furthermore, poetics soon overtakes both grammar and rhetoric in

been given to the *Institutio* for that reason. Finally, the very nature of medieval political life rendered the final two books largely irrelevant. (129-30)

Murphy's discussion here highlights the turn in rhetoric that I have been charting throughout this introduction. The arts of rhetoric and grammar, as John of Salisbury remarks in the introduction to his *Metalogicon*, become important particularly for the ways in which they support poetics.

⁴ Copeland and Sluiter discuss this at length in Part 4 of their book, in particular: "Medieval grammar students were taught to compose by imitating the examples from classical poetry which they also expounded for grammatical usage: in other words, composition was intimately connected with the control procedure of the grammatical classroom, *enarratio poetarum* (546).

popularity. Just as Quintillian found himself on the outs with the changing approaches to rhetoric moving into the twelfth century because of more concise and pragmatic approaches existed, treatments of grammar and rhetoric shorten to only what is necessary to foster a greater understanding of poetics. Copeland and Sluiter explain, “These new treatises brought a pragmatic grammar together with a pragmatic rhetoric, synthesizing the literary precept of Horace’s *Ars poetica* with the rhetorical precept of Cicero’s *De inventione* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herenium*” (547). Grammar and rhetoric continue to be discussed in these new treatises of course, but authors use them to instruct their readers in poetic composition.⁵ I will address three treatises here to note how these arts of poetry contribute to both the composition *and* interpretation of poetry: Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria*, Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria Nova*, and John of Garland’s *Parisiana Poetria*.

Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria* aims to link the intention of composition with the ornamentation of its presentation in a way that acknowledges a dichotomy, of sorts, between the author’s intention and its manifestation in the text. That is, an author’s intention may not always be expressed in the ornamentation that he chooses. In Part I of his treatise, Matthew advises, “And since the chief pursuit of the poetic faculty lies in skill in description, on this point my advice is to cultivate accuracy in descriptive expression, so that true things or verisimilitudes may be uttered” (564). Here, Matthew explains that the author should be aware of how he expresses himself because that expression ought to match the idea. This implies, then, that if the expression does not match the idea, the author is at fault for misrepresenting his sentence.

Interestingly, though, Matthew will later add, “Just as, in material things, the material of

⁵ Copeland and Sluiter marks this as a shift from the “interpretive stance” to the “generative stance” (548).

a statue is crude and stamped with no value until the zealous polishing of the craftsman makes it more pleasing, so too in a poem is the verbal material crude and inelegant until decorated by the artful setting of some *schemata*, tropes, or rhetorical colors” (568). The poet, then, has a duty to present his ideas clearly, yet poetry, as an art, has its own demands, too, that may indeed trouble such clarity. The poet’s original idea, during invention, should be expressed as clearly as possible, yet the art of poetry itself in putting the idea into poetic expression seems to jeopardize the unaffected transmission of that idea.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf comes up against this same issue of presenting the material accurately and also artfully in his *Poetria nova*. Geoffrey first discusses the ordering of a composition, expressing that order can be manipulated to make a text more pleasing:

Neither transposition of order should cause impropriety, but rather each part should take the other’s place fittingly, without strife, yielding to the other freely and pleasantly. Expert art inverts matters so as not to pervert them; it displaces materials so as to place it better thereby. This order, though reversed, is more pleasant and by far better than the straightforward order. The latter is sterile, but the former fertile, from its marvelous source sending out more branches from the parent trunk, changing one branch into many, a single into several, one into eight. (598)

The fertility to which Geoffrey refers, one guesses, must be the fertility of meaning. The order that he advises allows for more and greater interpretations than the chronological order of events. However, he notes that even in changing the order, this move should not “pervert” the matter. Geoffrey suggests that numerous available interpretations are good

as long as they are not misled.⁶ He argues similarly in his discussion of ornamentation: “First examine the soul of the word and then its face, whose outward show alone you should not trust. Unless the inner ornament conforms to the outer requirement, the relationship between the two is worthless” (602). Geoffrey’s words here impact both writing and reading. The first line discusses choosing the word to use, and when he notes that one should not trust its face alone, he indicates that the poet should not choose a word that merely looks good – it must also carry the meaning to match its ornament. But his advice echoes for the reader, too, so that he not interpret ornament for meaning. The ornament and the meaning need to have a relationship, Geoffrey concludes, lest the author corrupts his composition. If an author uses ornament that belies his meaning, he makes it fundamentally impossible for the reader to understand his intent. If the reader interprets ornament for meaning, he makes a similar error.

Finally, John of Garland addresses these issues in his *Parisiana poetria* at an advanced level. According to Copeland and Sluiter, “*The Parisiana poetria* is the consummate product of the grammatical and rhetorical curricula,” and, “The work develops the preceptive advice of the earlier *artes poetriae* to comprehend all kinds of written composition; but it also extends the theoretical scope of its ancient and medieval sources to attempt a synthetic picture of verbal style, literary form, and genres” (640). John’s discussions of beginnings and also narration are essential to understanding the eventual development of the framing devices discussed below. John notes that there are eight types of artificial beginnings:

⁶ Murphy notes that Geoffrey’s other major work, *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi*, “is a repetition of the ideas found in the *Poetria nova*, though often in a different order,” and continues, “The *Documentum* employs a somewhat different technical vocabulary, one notable instance being the use of the terms *ornata facilitas* and *ornata difficultas* for sets of figures which appear in the *Poetria nova* without that designation” (172). Geoffrey, as Murphy’s discussion indicates, clearly practiced what he preached.

The artificial beginning is when we start in the middle of the subject or at the end; we can do it in eight ways, and so this beginning has eight branches. The first branch or first type is when the artificial beginning is drawn either from the middle of the subject or from the end, without a proverb and without an example. The beginning is sometimes made with a proverb, which may concern the head of the subject, or the middle, or the end. Again, it is sometimes made with an example, which may concern the beginning of the subject, or the middle, or the end; and there you have the eight types. (650-51)

John's classification of these types here serves both writers and readers because he defines what they are and how they work. He sets expectations for the types of beginnings that a writer will use and/or that a reader will encounter. The types overlap one another, too, so John seems to allow indeterminacy in that regard. John's comments on narration are also merit attention: "Note, then, that the genus 'discourse' is threefold. The first kind is dramatic or deictic, that is, imitative or interrogative; the second is exegetical or apangelitic, that is expository, which some call hermeneutic, that is interpretive; the third is mictic or koinon, that is, mixed or common, also called didactic, that is, instructive" (655). The types here are not original to John, yet his discussion of them in terms of poetics is quite important because his discussion provides generic distinctions (at least within narrative compositions) throughout the rest of the Middle Ages.⁷

The Effects of the Arts of Poetry; Vernacular Poetics

⁷ Tony Davenport discusses authors' indebtedness to John of Garland in more detail (12-13).

These arts of poetry set expectations for writers who engage in this art, and yet the ways in which would-be authors learn how to write is by first reading, which presents a causal relationship between the process of reading and invention. At the same time, the availability of this style of learning opens up to learners in the vernacular, too (Copeland and Sluiter 819). It is not just that these authors learn how to write by reading, though; it is specifically the way in which they are taught that indicates an understanding of the interpretive process. This interpretive process privileges the reader, but it privileges a specific reader – the Latin-educated reader. The framing devices that this project takes into consideration work in the vernacular, which presents a different set of concerns.⁸ This shift is complicated, and how exactly it occurs is still becoming clear as scholarship in this area develops. Charles Sears Baldwin observes, “The Latin poetic that they [medieval story-tellers] all studied in school, practiced in *historia*, *fabula*, *argumentum*, and at greater length in saint’s legend, was too much absorbed in descriptive elaboration to teach them much of narrative (260). Baldwin demonstrates the relationship to which I have been gesturing – that students learn to write through studying (reading) poetry. Baldwin, however, makes this observation in the early twentieth century (1928), and thinking seems to have changed since then. The actions that students undertook in the classroom largely influenced their understanding of invention. Copeland, one of the main authorities in this field of criticism at present,⁹ makes the case for invention as an hermeneutical act throughout her text, and she then argues, “If invention can be understood as hermeneutical performance on a traditional textual source, this model of invention can also extend to certain forms of vernacular exegetical translation” (*Rhetoric*,

⁸ Janet Coleman’s *Medieval Readers and Writers 1350-1400* discusses some of these concerns in detail.

⁹ Her landmark book, *Rhetoric, Translation and Hermeneutics in the Middle Ages*, is essential reading for anyone interested in this topic.

Translation and Hermeneutics 179). She then continues, “These texts carry out the prescriptions of the *artes poetriae* by turning techniques of exegesis into techniques of topical invention. In this way they also redefine the terms of vernacular translation itself: they use the techniques of exegetical translation to produce, not a supplement to the original, but a vernacular substitute for that original” (*Rhetoric, Translation and Hermeneutics* 179). Copeland demonstrates how such hermeneutical acts are in fact authors ascribing to the Augustinian tradition in which interpretation lies with the reader.¹⁰

If authors believe that the interpretation of meaning is the reader’s domain, then the use of framing devices would seem to undermine such a claim. And yet, at the same time, these framing devices are hallmarks of a rhetorical tradition (discussed above) that cannot help but to occur in composition and that audiences would have expected. Douglas Kelly, speaking about arts of poetry and prose, notes, “Every phase of composition, from conception to ornamentation, is subsequent to auctorial intention” (38). Kelly’s observation reflects on the commentaries and treatises in particular, and yet these same practices carry over into vernacular poetics, too. In particular to the Aristotelian prologue, Alastair Minnis observes, “The prologues with which certain late medieval compilers introduced their works also display the influence of the literary theory developed by scholastic commentators (162). In other words, the scholastic commentaries which authors were reading in schools influence the ways in which they present their own texts. Minnis addresses this transmission from study to invention in his

¹⁰ Copeland remarks of Dante’s *Convivio*: “it rehabilitates rhetoric as an inspired hermeneutical performance. Like Augustine, Dante extends or transfers rhetorical control to readers by locating the real power of ethical inquiry in the act of interpretation or reading and by offering his own exegetical performance as a kind of program for his readers” (*Rhetoric, Translation and Hermeneutics* 183).

introduction to *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100 – c.1375*: “In that final stage, wherein literary attitudes and hermeneutic techniques which had long been used in expounding ancient and revered Latin authorities . . . were transferred to the exposition of ‘modern’ and inventive writers in the vernacular, may be detected the origins of modern literary criticism as we know it” (2). Even though my project does not address the literary criticism to which Minnis points, it does show us that the reading techniques that students applied to classical texts were beginning to be applied to, then, modern texts. Critical reading, essentially, was the way that one read. In this case, rhetorical framing devices could be viewed as an expectation with which the reader comes to a text. Ruth Morse elaborates on this idea: “Were there not large scope for manipulation there could be no irony, no parody, no development – only imitation and pastiche, or the repetitive reproduction of earlier authorities. And understanding these manipulations implies an audience with different expectations about how texts represent and refer from those which many modern readers would bring to their reading” (3). Authors are not attempting to control or to fool their readers; rather, they present rhetorically-sophisticated texts that acknowledge the ways in which their audience reads.

Bringing Frames into Focus elucidates the possible rhetorical moves authors make in their texts in response to these ways of reading. Framing devices are not necessarily authors’ attempting to limit interpretation; instead, they are the rhetorical ornamentation proposed in the treatises and commentaries of the scholastic tradition

(whether the authors are aware of using them¹¹). Jesse M. Gellrich summarizes the importance of this practice, new to the later Middle Ages, discussing Chaucer and Dante:

Chaucer and Dante embraced those commitments [of the idea of the Book, its grounding in fixed meanings validated in a definite origin] firmly, but at the same time they emphasized what linguistic disciplines tried to suppress – a discourse that recognizes its own impossibilities and proceeds by locating the authority for making sense no longer in the pages of the past, but in the hands of the reader. (27)

Gellrich identifies this move as a break with tradition, but I think what we have seen in the progression of the commentary tradition actually supports the argument that he makes here. Authors realize the open nature of interpretation: the use of framing devices is in many ways play – the ernst and game so often espoused by Chaucer or Gower in discussing their own literary enterprises. *Bringing Frames into Focus* argues that these frames bring about a sense of interpretive play and demonstrate an understanding of reading-as-interpretation with which these Middle English authors were intimately familiar. This project engages these texts through their framing devices which could be large and noticeable as the prologue in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the seemingly insignificant narratorial tags in *The Romaunce of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, or the way in which memory and the episodic nature of contemplative writing may frame a text in Margery Kempe's *Book*. All of these frames control the presentation of the text while implicitly recognizing that such ornamentation cannot, ultimately, control interpretation.

There are many more framing devices available to consider – especially the dream vision

¹¹ Marry Carruthers opines, "Authorial intention in itself is given no more weight than that of any subsequent reader who uses the work in his own meditative composition; the important 'intention' is in the work, as its *res*, a cluster of meanings which are only partially revealed in its original statements" (191).

and medieval drama – but these three in particular demonstrate the variety of such devices and the vastness of readers’ expectations to which they may respond. This work itself is, in many ways, a prologue to what will become a longer work or numerous other works, but it asks us to embrace medieval reading practices in order to begin to understand the complicated (and continuing) influence of these rhetorical practices on reading, writing, and interpretation.

Chapter One. Beginnings and Endings: Circular Framing in *Confessio*

Amantis

In the fourteenth-century in England, authors used framing devices to guide readers in interpreting their texts. This practice stems out of an academic tradition in which a lecture introducing an *auctor* (a respected and credible writer, usually ancient) would develop into a *Prologus* introducing the commentary on that *auctor*'s work (Minnis *Medieval Theory of Authorship* 1-3, 10). Later, authors begin to apply this academic practice to their own texts. As Alistair Minnis has shown, "The writers of *artes praedicandi* were especially fond of describing the *causae* of their works" (*Medieval Theory of Authorship* 161). However, the authors of these texts concerning the art of preaching were not alone. Authors such as Robert Mannyng, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Usk, Thomas Hoccleve, and John Lydgate all appended various forms of *Prologus* to their works, authorizing and explaining the purpose(s) of their texts.¹² John Gower was not the exception to his contemporaries; however, Gower's frame extends beyond the *Prologus*. Gower's framing device in *Confessio Amantis* is a circular frame that does not come to fruition until the revelatory moment when Venus reveals Amans as John Gower. This circular frame is unusual in its delayed completion and it is also unusual in its effect. Furthermore, it responds to a larger historical shift in the locus of meaning that had begun in the twelfth century: whereas it once was the author's domain, it had since become the reader's, as discussed in the introduction. Rita Copeland has shown that this shift "gives the reader the power of invention. It gives reading and interpretation - the traditional province of the grammarian - a new status, as textual power shifts from authorial

¹² For specific examples, see Wogan-Browne *et al.* 3-105.

intention to 'affective stylistics,' to what the reader can do with the text. In practice it transfers responsibility for making meaning from the writer to the reader" (158). In *Confessio Amantis*, Gower employs a circular frame to elicit a revisionary readership, newly equipped with the power of reinterpretation. The ending of *Confessio* is as important as its beginning precisely because the frame is not fully realized (by the reader) until the revelatory moment.

In the pre-revelatory context under the auspices of the *Prologus*, Gower creates dichotomies that the poem eventually will reject and reveal as related concepts: love v. wisdom and individual v. community. These dichotomies serve, initially, as models for reading practices. The *Prologus* suggests reading a poem about love differs from reading a poem about wisdom; furthermore, the respective emphases of the *Prologus* and the second *Prologus* at the beginning of Book I suggest different modes of reading – reading for oneself or for one's community. These pairings at first seem mutually exclusive, which is essential to the effect of the delayed revelatory moment. Gower creates the dichotomy between love and wisdom through the turn at the end of the *Prologus* when he concedes wisdom as a matter "Which non bot only God may stiere" (Pr.1088). By the end of the poem, however, it is evident that Amans's confession about love has led to wisdom, too. Similarly, Gower creates a dichotomy between individual and community. First, Gower claims his poem is "A bok for Engelondes sake" (Pr.24), but then later Gower shifts his poem to focus on one lover's confession (1.93-95). This dichotomy between individual and community, too, proves false after Venus banishes the unmasked old John Gower and advises he "let reson be thi guide" before he prays for England

(8.2919, 2980-94). After the revelatory moment, these pairs prove to share commonalities indicative of the unity Gower's poem advocates.

The third dichotomy that plays a crucial role in Gower's circular framing is inward v. outward, but Gower cannot transform this dichotomy into a productive relationship. Yet, Gower makes this dichotomy a useful tool in his poem. The contradiction between inward and outward cannot be assuaged because it lies outside of Gower's control: even by the end of *Confessio* – after the revelatory moment – it remains impossible to know another's inward intent through his outward action. Gower, though, models a reading practice that depends on the constant awareness of the potential contradiction between inward and outward through this dichotomy, and, in so doing, he alludes to the circular frame of the poem and to the instability of the world outside of the poem. Gower navigates this dichotomy within his own poem through the circular frame, and he also uses a number of other textual structures – headings, marginalia, etc. These structures attempt to dictate a way of reading the content they frame, but they also draw subtle attention to the deceptive game that Gower plays. Genius tells Amans time and again to beware deceit in his stories regarding the Seven Deadly Sins, so, in one sense, Gower warns his model reader, Amans, about the deceit of others. Simultaneously, however, Gower deceives other readers through delaying the revelation of the circular frame. This delay is necessary in order that the revelatory moment at the end of the poem has its full effect. In other words, Gower must deceive his readers to fulfill the intent of the *Confessio* – deceit is part and parcel of the poem's reading process.

Exegetical Structures and the Critical Context

Many critics identify the frame of *Confessio* as just one of what Rita Copeland calls “the governing exegetical structures of the text” (203). These structures are many, but I find it illuminating to preface my argument with a survey of these structures and the critical discourse surrounding them in Gower scholarship. The *Prologus* is the natural starting place for critics, but additional framing structures such as the Latin headnotes and marginalia have also been discussed. In his seminal work *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, Alistair Minnis identifies two types of *Prologus* going on in *Confessio Amantis*: intrinsic and extrinsic (180). He traces this practice to “treating wisdom” (180), and he concludes, “The *Prologus* to the *Confessio amantis* is, in fact, an extrinsic *Prologus* about *sapientia*; the treatise which follows it is about human love, *amor*” (180). Minnis’s observation here establishes a sense of instability in the poem from its beginning: *Confessio* initially claims to be one type of poem before revising its aims entirely into being about something else. In addition to the *Prologus*, there are Latin apparatus, about which Patricia Batchelor remarks, “Like the mingled ‘lust’ and ‘lore’ in the work, text and apparatus are interdependent. Moreover, as text and gloss variously influence and modify each other, the works suggests instability in the relations among truth, fiction, and *auctoritas*” (2). Batchelor speaks specifically to all of these apparatus working independently, but her point concerning instability holds equally true just concerning the two *Prologuss* of the poem. Derek Pearsall contends that the *Prologus* functions in two ways: first, it develops the “idea that division is the source of all evil” in order to prepare “the way for the transition to love, which is for all its blind instinctful nature, a unitive and not a divisive principle and in which therefore the reconciliation of division may be

found” and second, it “provides the basic moral frame in which the picture of ‘love’ is to be held steady” (476). The frame of *Confessio*, though, is not steady; rather, Gower develops it as the poem progresses, achieving stability only by the end of the poem with the completion of that frame.

Paul Strohm, too, addresses the ways in which these apparatus control interpretation in *Confessio*, but he approaches it from the stand point of neo-Marxist “mediation,” arguing that “the external form of a major work may be seen as an artistic mediation of contemporary social issues, expressive not only of aesthetic choices, but also of the social perspective of its author” (18). For Strohm, the framing of *Confessio* attempts to promulgate social order or structure onto the reader of the poem. This framing enacts the order that *Confessio* desires to create in the real social world. Strohm’s point, though it has greater implications, demonstrates the ability of Gower’s text to act upon its reader. He further identifies “Gower’s commitment to the creation of moral hierarchies based on identification of virtue with acceptance of estate, degree, and natural limits” (30). *Confessio*, in Strohm’s argument, reinforces a rigid social structure on its reader – emphasizes the need for hierarchy in a top-down political system. While Strohm’s point is well-taken, the reading structure, though it may indeed have political consequences such as Strohm suggests, is actually a deeper structure of the poem and its ultimate enterprise, revealed only at its end. This reading structure, indeed, is what drives the poem’s success.

Kurt Olsson calls *Confessio* “the most complex of [Gower’s] poems,” considering the textual structures of the poem – what he terms “frames of perception” (1, 3). Olsson’s work resonates in particular with my argument, especially his point that *Confessio* must

be taken as a whole in order to fully understand it: “We can never be sure, before we read the entire work, that Gower has really supplied his doctrine on a given subject in a single tale, excursus, or piece of dialogue, neatly placed within the limits of an announced topic: at another point in the work he might present another, sometimes opposed, and equally tenable reading of that subject” (11-12). Even though Olsson points particularly to the content of Gower’s poem, I believe the frame operates in the same manner. We may think we know what Gower is working toward, but it is not until the end – the revelatory moment – that we come to understand his enterprise has been about something else all along.

Other critics posit to whom Gower may be indebted insofar as his structures within the poem. Winthrop Wetherbee notes a Boethius strain in *Confessio*’s structures. Wetherbee believes “the Boethian tradition as [Gower] interpreted it is a constant questioning of its own authority” (182). Ardis Butterfield focuses on the confession structure and the lover in *Confessio*, tracing Gower’s indebtedness to French love narratives, specifically the “constant play on the borderlines between different kinds of consciousness, dreaming, waking, swooning, dying” (166, 168). Butterfield reasons that the lover’s passing from one state of mind into another “is more than a cleverly constructed portrayal of psychological disorientation. Gower makes the disorientation depend on a question about identity” (168). For Butterfield, then, *Confessio* remains a poem in which the poet’s concern is primarily selfish. The ultimate goal is, for Gower, “a way of examining the art of fiction, and hence the multiple art of confessing the self” (180). *Confessio* is a poem about authorship, surely, yet it also asks the reader to reflect on the act of reading. The framing of the poem, on one hand, prepares its reader for the

personal confession of Amans, but it initially promises more than that, too. Butterfield's reading of the poem, then, only partially explains the framing that Gower employs, for it goes beyond Gower (Amans) himself.

James Simpson begins to gesture toward this expansive framing of *Confessio*, noting that the poem is directed to the reader, specifically, "Gower's ideal philosopher-king" (203). More importantly, though, Simpson demonstrates Gower's expectation that the reader ultimately controls interpretation in the poem: "The real meaning of the poem is to be located not so much in its represented action as in the experience it provokes in its reader" (203). The framing of the poem is crucial to provoking what the reader experiences because it is the device that impacts the ways in which the reader interprets the poem. Simpson adds, "A concept of self-knowledge is, then, implicit in the structure of the whole poem" (204). If we connect Simpson's argument to what Butterfield argues above, we see that the process of confession is modeled for the reader to come to such self-knowledge. The revelatory moment occurs during Amans's confession, but the impetus for the reader comes in Amans's "penance," which is to say, reconsideration. Once the reader realizes that she has read for wisdom all along, this recursive move increases the interpretive possibilities for her.

Confessio is a poem about writing, but it is also a poem about reading. Russell Peck famously argues in *Kingship and Common Profit* that the *Prologus* reflects the need for common profit in the governance of a nation – England in this case. Peck's point here marks *how* the poem sets itself up to be read. He remarks, "The heart of Gower's *Prologus* is his estimate of the three estates (pts. ii-iv), where he shows the duplicity and chaos which result when man loses his sense of divine center" (10). Peck rightly

acknowledges duplicity as a result, but Gower uses it as a tool, too – that is, Gower uses duplicity as didactic tool within his poem. Peck adds later in discussing Nebuchadnezzar's dream, "The problem [of interpretation] is largely the result of man's limited perspective" (21). We can take Peck's argument further. Man's perspective, particularly in the example he discusses pertaining to Nebuchadnezzar's dream, is *inherently* limited; Gower both points this out in his reading of the dream and then goes on to utilize this very limitation in framing his poem.

Peck and Simpson both suggest the poem works to show its reader, in a sense, *how* to read, perhaps without saying as much explicitly. The narrative of *Confessio* is what J. Allan Mitchell calls an "exemplary narrative." Mitchell remarks in the opening of *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* "One thing medieval writers ordinarily presuppose is a cultural context of reception in which examples are given and taken as precepts; examples are meant to move or improve you" (1). Readers *read* works for a moral or an example of *how* to live (in one sense or another). It is an expectation of that they have for reading literature. Mitchell situates "reading for the moral" in "what medieval exegetes called the 'tropological' response" (14). He clarifies,

Suffice it to say that I do not just mean reading for some codified moral *norm* when I invoke tropology to explain exemplary narrative. Tropology is instead founded in an individual and conscionable response to *exemplified* moral norms. In the strongest terms, tropology implies the potential for a conversion - a *turning* of text and reader - as a fully realized pragmatic reader response. (15)

The process of reading that such readers employ, then, is something crucial to not only our understanding of how they may have interpreted a text but also to our understanding of how an author crafts his text if indeed such a turn is anticipated. In *Confessio*, as has been thoroughly noted, there is clearly a turn. Critics, though, have produced a number of readings considering how that turn contributes to the narrative of the poem as a whole and then, taken as a whole, what the implications of this turn are for the reader.

These critics all consider the structures and/or methods Gower uses to set up his poem to be read either at the beginning or during the body of the poem, but I believe the circular frame of the poem for which I argue is the sum of all of these parts. That is, the circular frame encompasses the framing structures *and* models a way of reading¹³, uniting both of these processes in order for the poem to succeed. My focus for this argument is *how* Gower creates such a circular frame and, then, how this frame effects reading the poem. When I use the word “frame,” I refer to the Middle English *Prologus* and the Middle English epilogue at the end of Book VIII.¹⁴ The circular framing of *Confessio Amantis* relies on a revelatory moment in Book VIII - when Amans is outted as John Gower - because this revelation, and its aftermath, demonstrate to the reader the necessity of reflection and retrospective contemplation - what the poem refers to as “*por reposer*” (8.2907). Gower's initial framing of *Confessio* relies on an underlying instability/deception for the poem to succeed and reveals, by the poem's end, that *Confessio's* frame is circular rather than just a *Prologus*.

¹³ Northrop Frye makes a similar observation (52), but proceeds without exploring the implications upon which this chapter focuses.

¹⁴ I do not consider the Latin sections of *Confessio* to be a frame; rather, using Copeland's term, they are “exegetical structures” that exist alongside and in addition to the Middle English framing structure.

The Initial Frame

Two recensions of the *Prologus* of *Confessio Amantis* are important to the discussion at hand: the Ricardian and the Lancastrian, named for the respective dedicatee named at the end of the *Prologus*. The Lancastrian recension is generally held to be the "revised" version of the *Prologus*, in which all reference to the deposed Richard II has been removed.¹⁵ Judith Ferster observes, "Gower's assiduous revising is evidence that he did, on occasion, change his mind or alliances" (109). These revisions - that the *Prologus* and ending of Book 8 exist in two (or more) versions - additionally reflect an instability in the framing of Gower's poem. Presenting a poem with, essentially, two dedications highlights Gower's revisionary practices. The instability of the world outside of the poem infiltrates Gower's framing; furthermore, Gower's revisionist tendency indicates the shift from the individual (Richard) to community (England) that the poem will duplicate by its end.

The beginning of the *Prologus* juxtaposes the theme of mutability and inconstancy in mortal life in order to demonstrate the lasting presence of books to the reader. Gower situates *Confessio* in a tradition of books:

Of hem that writen ous tofore

The bokes duelle, and we therefore

Ben tawht of that was write tho:

¹⁵ Peter Nicholson makes a compelling argument, however, that we cannot know which recension is correct. He notes, "A preferable reading is not necessarily a revised one, and an awkward, unmetrical, or ungrammatical reading is not necessarily the poet's first try. Indeed in textual studies we must ordinarily assume the opposite, that the best reading is also the earliest one; and Macaulay's proposed chronology of the changes in the text runs directly contrary to all of our normal assumptions about scribal alteration and corruption during copying. The questions that are raised by his conclusions are obviously important to establishing the form in which Gower first presented the *Confessio*. They also have direct bearing on our understanding of the major revisions of the poem, including the chronology of recensions 2 and 3, and perhaps most importantly of all, on our understanding of the production and dissemination of English literary texts in general at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries" (124-25).

Forthi good is that we also
In oure tyme among ous hie
Do wryte of newe som matiere,
Essampled of these olde wyse,
So that it myhte in such a wyse,
Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,
Beleve to the worldes eere
In tyme comende after this. (Pr.1-11)

In just eleven lines, Gower shows the relationship of past, present, and future to his current enterprise. Having read the books from the past, Gower crafts something in his present that will exist into the future after his body has died. This opening salvo underscores Gower's determination to preserve some piece of his work in perpetuity in spite of mortality - his determination for a sort of remembrance. Immediately, then, Gower acknowledges the inevitability of change and decay while at the same time gesturing toward his hope that his own work may avoid this fate - that it may be left behind for the world to hear in times to come. These lines display a concern for the mark that Gower will leave behind in an unstable world, constantly in flux.

Change preoccupies the *Prologus* in both recensions, but the tone surrounding it becomes markedly darker in the Lancastrian recension. Gower originally writes in a joyful tone, one filled with hope for the promise of the young King Richard. England, in this recension, is "newe Troye, / Which took of Brut his ferste joye" (Pr.*37-*38). In the Lancastrian recension, Gower writes "A bok for Engelondes sake" and, what seems rather

anxious, "What schal befall hierafterward / God wot" (Pr.24, 26-27). Such concern is even more evident here in Gower's discussion of the world:

Bot for men sein it is now lassed,
In worse plit that it was tho,
I thenke for to touche also
The world which neweth every dai,
So as I can, so as I mai. (Pr.56-60)

These lines indicate that Gower remains hopeful and that renewal will come out of the current plight of the world. Instability is a concern for Gower, but he counters this concern with a determination to show that good will win out, or, at least, that wisdom will: "For this prologe is so assised / That it to wisdom al belongeth" (Pr.66-67). The beginning of the *Prologus* demonstrates the tension between the instability of the world outside of the poem and the ways in which Gower's poem attempts to temper such instability by teaching wisdom to its reader. The reader acquires wisdom, then, through reading the poem.

The Lancastrian recension of the *Prologus* hints toward the circular framing of *Confessio* by suddenly changing the premise of the poem from wisdom to love. Gower acknowledges that the subject matter of the *Prologus* is *not* going to be what the body of the poem focuses upon:

Whan the *Prologus* is so despended,
This bok schal afterward ben ended
Of love, which doth many a wonder
And many a wys man hath put under. (Pr.73-76)

If the *Prologus* is assigned to wisdom, as cited above, and if love can hoodwink a wise man, the point of this *Prologus* comes under question. Wisdom, though powerful, holds less power over man than does love, yet Gower begins his poem by discussing his attempt to leave a lasting wisdom for men to hear. Something does not add up here, and the ending of the first part of the *Prologus* in both recensions signals the beginnings of a *why*. In the Ricardian recension, Gower notes that his *Prologus* will discuss the past, the present, and the lessons we can take from both:

And thus the prologe of my book
After the world that whilom took,
And eek somdel after the newe,
I wol begynne for to newe. (Pr.*89-*92)

Here, Gower motions toward continuity - a *translatio imperii* or *translatio studii* of the past coalescing with the present to make something yet greater. Copeland succinctly explains:

In this image of historical and cultural recuperation lies one of the most powerful contradictions of Gower's vernacular project. The idea of conserving the past as a bulwark against the mutability of the present . . . invokes the very ideological assumptions of medieval academic culture: to preserve a lineal continuity with the *antiqui*, a myth of continuity which is most forcefully expressed in the linguistic practice of *Latinitas*. But even as Gower's text invokes this ideal of continuity and undertakes the project of cultural recuperation, it embodies the very process of rupture and mutability that it decries. . . . (218).

This move follows the hopefulness of Gower's discussion with the young King Richard (Pr.*34-*53). However, in the Lancastrian recension there is a sense of weariness:

So woll I now this werk embrace

With hol trust and with hol believe.

God grante I mot it wel achieve. (Pr. 90-92)

Russell Peck glosses the last line as "that I have the power to finish" (*John Gower* 47), but this line could instead refer back to the act of embracing in the first, emphasizing wholeness and an embracing of that wholeness - both images of circularity. At this moment in the *Prologus*, Gower hints toward the circular frame he uses in *Confessio Amantis* that is not revealed until its end. He embraces his poem in two senses: first, he willingly accepts the task that lies before him,¹⁶ but second, and more importantly, he embraces his work as if in a hug. The structure he uses to embrace his text is the circular frame. If Gower is obsessed with controlling the interpretation of his work, this moment speaks to that obsession. Gower's appeal to God for help in this task is conventional and signifies the difficulty of achieving the order he seeks.

Establishing Deceit

Gower disguises this circular frame through a cunning use of deceit. Deceit is an overwhelming concern of the poem to which Gower returns time and again. It pervades the content of the poem, and Gower uses deceit to mirror this concern of the content in his circular frame. Despite all of his warnings about deceit and the deceitful nature of man the reader falls victim to the greatest act of deceit in *Confessio* – the frame of the poem itself. This lesson of Gower's is the type of exemplary narrative that Mitchell

¹⁶ Interestingly, it is this exact example that the *OED* cites as the first usage in English of such a meaning ("embrace, v.2").

discusses. He adds that the moralizing of these *exempla* “occurs off the page,” and “*Confessio* is meant to stimulate reader response” (38-39). In *Confessio*, the reader experiences the lesson through reading the text. Hence, the importance of the revelatory moment at the end of the poem: it is only then that the reader realizes the deceit in which he or she has willingly participated. Gower crafts his poem with a circular frame to evoke such a delayed response because it necessitates the retrospection the poem seeks.

Deceit is a major theme of the *Prologus* in two different senses. First, deceit is indeed something that concerns Gower; second, he is engaged in a bit of a game with his reader, simultaneously revealing and hiding one of his poetic tactics. Gower tells his reader what he is about while fooling his reader in the process of telling. After the initial explanation of origins section, the *Prologus* shifts into an estates satire of sorts. Gower begins with the State, bemoaning its fall from the Golden Age of “tyme passed” that he finds “Write in cronique” (Pr.94, 101). The State has fallen into a worse plight now, and gone are the days when one knew a man’s heart by his face:

Of mannes herte the corage
Was schewed thane in the visage;
The word was lich to the conceite
Withoute semblant of deceite. (Pr.111-14)

These two clauses present two important images. The initial couplet suggests that a man’s face would reflect his heart: that one could know what a man was thinking and feeling by looking at his face. The second couplet claims that words used to match the meaning without a trace of deceit. Both couplets refer to reading or interpretation. Gower demonstrates that such one-to-one correspondence between act and intent no longer

exists in his world. He adds, “Now stant the crop under the rote” (Pr.118), which reinforces the argument he has already made, but this line also applies on a more literal level to the current poem that is being read. This line points toward a playfulness – an in-between space of lust and lore that Gower promises earlier. Gower’s poem, too, is in the present world in which everything is topsy-turvy, and so the reader should not trust that Gower is not engaging the very deceit he critiques. Working in an exemplary mode, Gower would be well within the genre’s limits to educate his reader by making the reader experience such deceit. Mitchell has succinctly noted, “Gower teaches practice by way of practice” (42).

Gower transitions into a critique of the Catholic Church’s clergy’s deceit, which here seems to be doubly damning since, indeed, it is the clergy’s role to act as shepherds to Christ’s sheep. Instead, the clergy, filled with covetousness and pride, “scheweth outward a visage / Of that is noght in the corage” (Pr.447-48). The faces of the clergy do not match the cruel intentions in their heart. Gower emphasizes this point, noting, “For if men loke in holy cherche, / Betwen the word and that thei werche / Ther is full gret difference” (Pr.449-51). The difference between word and action is once again stressed by Gower: if men look at what is said versus what is done, they will see the discontinuity – the deceit – at play. Curiously, Gower restates this point lines later:

Who that here words understode,
It thinkth thei wolden do the same;
Bot yet between earnest and game
Ful ofte it torneth otherwise. (Pr.460-53)

If one understands the words of the clergy, he would assume they would follow the words that they preach, yet, what seems to be serious is often play – that is, the joke is on the man who believes that the clergy *would* practice what they preach. Larry Scanlon has suggested that Gower indicts clerical authority and offers a lay authority in its stead (250); but while there clearly is a critique here, realigning power structures is not Gower's ultimate goal. Gower does not absolve the clergy from its wrongdoing here; instead, this example serves, again, to display the inherent play that Gower observes and uses in the space between words and interpretation.

The final section of Gower's estate satire, *The Commons*, lacks a definitive statement allotting deceit to this estate as found in the previous estates; instead, this section models the reading practice one should follow to navigate the contradictions between inner and outer while recognizing that deceit is a specifically human error. Rather than discuss the commons' use of deceit, Gower discusses their inability to judge (to read) correctly. What may seem a minor difference is actually a crucial turn for the interpretation of the poem. Gower has moved from critiquing those in power who have an obligation to rightly govern those below them to critiquing those subject to power for not being more wary of what they are told, what they read, etc. Strohm interprets this moment as an example of the rigid social structure that Gower imposes ("Form and Social Statement in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Canterbury Tales*" 30), but this moment actually imposes a rigid reading structure in order to expose the inherent deceit in such social hierarchy. Peck observes Gower's move to highlight "man's inability to perceive so evident an evil or know what to do about it" (18). Gower reinforces the idea that all knowledge is in God, but he does so by reminding his reader of the falsity of the world:

The world as of his propre kynde
Was evere untrewē, and as the blynde
Impropelich he demeth fame,
He blameth that is noght to blame
And preiseth that is noght to preise.
Thus whan he schal the thinges peise,
Ther is decepte in his balance,
And al is that the variance
Of ous, that schold ous betre advise. (Pr.535-43)

Gower claims that humans lack the knowledge of God and, therefore, are often left blind, stumbling through a world that requires judgment. This blindness, though, seems in some way inherent to man rather than a fault that he has developed over time. Because of this blindness, humans are unable to rightly interpret their experiences – written, aural, etc. The last couplet unequivocally places the fault of interpretation in human variance – the internal division of a human. It is humans, not meaning, that are variable, and, as the last line indicates, humans should *know better* and then use this knowledge of their own disunity to consider what they interpret around them. Gower places himself amongst the commons in the final line with the repetition of “us.” He acknowledges his own variance, which suggests, if only subtly, that there may be deceit in his judgment as the previous lines express. Furthermore, humans are inherently unstable, which suggests that a text produced by a man, too, is unstable. Instability applies to both the text and its reader; it is only by the end of the poem and through retrospective revision that Gower stabilizes both the text and, through the act of reading, reader.

Because Gower has implicitly advocated a more wary reading practice in his section on the Commons and has decried the deceit of both the State and Church, it is indeed curious that he would follow with a section that exemplifies exactly the opposite arguments in the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar. To summarize, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in which he sees “a wonder strange ymage” – a man’s figure – made out of gold, silver, brass, steel, and clay. He relates this dream to Daniel, who interprets the various materials relating to the ages of man, ending with the present world in decay (Pr.602-821). Before Nebuchadnezzar tells his dream to Daniel, though, Gower writes, “To Daniel his drem he tolde, / And preide him faire that he wolde / Arede what it tokne may” (Pr.599-601). Nebuchadnezzar forfeits his ability to interpret. He allows someone else, Daniel, to interpret what he has seen for him, and, similarly, Amans will allow Genius to interpret the tales for him. These readers ignore the message of the *Prologus* thus far, yet ascribing this contradiction to part of Gower’s game in *Confessio* may alleviate it. Despite having been warned against trusting the words and actions of others because these outward acts may not match their true inward intentions, the reader observes a Biblical exemplum in which the main character ignores such a warning. The interpretive practices extolled in the *Prologus*, then, merit critical attention. Gower’s placement of this tale models for his reader a trust that he has all but made impossible in the earlier sections of the *Prologus*.

Daniel’s prophecy to Nebuchadnezzar serves as an elaborate show of how the world has fallen into division from its previous glory and as an explanation of how the decay of the world has spawned deceit. Gower models an anagogical reading. The prophecy of Daniel has come to fruition in the history of the world at last:

And in the wise,
As ye tofore have herd devise
How Daniel the swevene expoundeth
Of that ymage, on whom he foundeth
The world which after scholde falle,
Come is the laste tokne of alle. (Pr.821-26)

As the reader has seen Daniel do, so now the narrator does, comparing the current state of the world with the biblical prophecy and concluding that the final part of the prophecy is being fulfilled. The world continues to decay:

And that is for to rewe sore,
For alway siththe more and more
The world empeireth every day. (Pr.831-33)

This discussion demonstrates to the reader the fallenness of society, and when he claims that the world is further impaired every day, Gower allows the reader to infer that language and reading have fallen, too.¹⁷ Such a move shifts the type of reading that the poem emphasizes. Rather than reading tropologically, as Mitchell has suggested (15), this section of the *Prologus* advocates, if only briefly, reading the current world's fallenness as fulfillment of scripture. Gower presents in this section of *Confessio*, as Russell Peck has notably observed, the division of the world and its propensity for deceit. Gower proves in this section of the *Prologus* that the world is divided; that is, he has essentially established the context for deceit *after* describing its actions in the world. Gower identifies the root of division in the world stemming from the internal division of man,

¹⁷ Gower directly references the story of the Tower of Babel later in the *Prologus* to emphasize this point (Pr.1017-25).

which serves Gower's framing by placing man's inability to detect truth from deceit in the context of his inability to know himself.¹⁸ The world, too, will remain in discord as long as man:

Therwhile himself stant out of herre,
The remenant wol noght acorde.
And in this wise, as I recorde,
The man is cause of alle wo,
Why this world is divided so. (Pr.962-66)

The implicit suggestion is that man's imperfection allows imperfection to exist in the world. This claim becomes rather problematic when one considers that man is always fallen in the Christian context. Thus, the world, too, is always divided. By placing the foundation of the world's division in man, Gower can further limit his focus to the confession of a particular man, Amans. Through that man he can then model his own reading practices that, after the revelatory moment, he will project onto his readers. The process of reading *Confessio* brings the reader wisdom and suggests the application of that wisdom via retrospection can unify the various divisions of life. This alignment becomes especially clear at the end of the *Prologus* when Gower writes, "And now namore, / As for to speke of this matiere, / Which non bot only God may stiere" (1086-88). The poetic enterprise shifts from curing the world's problems because only God can control something of such magnitude. The world is outside of Gower's control, yet his poem remains firmly in his control by making this move. He cannot solve the division of the world, but he can enact the process of uniting the internally divided man.

¹⁸ Confession, unsurprisingly, cures such internal division. Thus, it follows that the circular frame of the poem enacts such a process on the reader. Such a discussion is tangentially related to the current argument, and so it does not appear here.

The relationships between authority, deceit, and interpretation as Gower presents them in his *Prologus* illuminate how the circular frame of this poem operates. In the examples of the State and the Church, Gower displays the difficulty in knowing the correspondence between something that is, outwardly, said/seen and what is, inwardly, intended/meant. In the example of the Commons, he faults man for not realizing his own limitations in interpreting truth while placing himself in the same fallible interpretive position. Expanding into a model of reading in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream allows Gower to demonstrate the context of fallenness for his poem while at the same time enabling the subtle deceit of his framing process. Gower plays with his readers, presenting a poem that is originally framed as one about wisdom before shifting its focus to love due to what only can be described as exercise in futility in attempting to figure out *how* man might become wise enough to discern true from false, honesty from deceit, and earnest from game. Gower shows in the *Prologus* that deceit problematizes man's quest for wisdom, and so he also wants to combat deceit. But as this section has demonstrated, Gower uses deceit in order to teach his readers how to recognize deceit, or, at least, the proper approach to take in any interpretive moment in order to prevent oneself from falling victim to it. As William Robins argues, "the *Prologus* serves as a spur (line 1084) to bring readers to an admission that their own predicament of making sense of the world is bound up in competing narrative understandings of temporality" (177). Gower emphasizes the issue of deceit in his words, but by enacting deceit through the circular frame of his poem – an enactment that the reader only realizes has occurred by the revelatory moment at its end – Gower leads his reader through the experience of deceit to the moment of revelation that asks the readers to reconsider their experience of the poem.

Gower must use deceit because deceit is an inherent condition of fallen language in a fallen world.

Furthering the Frame: Wisdom into Love

After the *Prologus* proper, there is another sort of *Prologus* at the beginning of Book I – what Minnis has famously termed an “intrinsic prologue” (30-33). Despite setting up *Confessio* to be about wisdom, Gower shifts his stated purpose here to instead talk about love. This shift revises the frame further to an individual case – that of Amans.¹⁹ In doing so, Gower presents a microcosm in Amans of the universal issues to which he gestures in the *Prologus*, which lessens the problem of discerning the difference between intent and meaning. Amans, in his confession, can explain exactly what his intent was behind his actions, and yet his interpretation is often subsumed by Genius’s (his confessor). Picking up where the *Prologus* ends, he remarks that he cannot “streche up to the hevene” his hand nor “setten al in even / This world” (1.1-3). These lines suggest that such a task is too great for him – something outside of his ability to control. Instead, he will treat on love – “thing is noght so strange, / Which every kinde hath upon honde” (1.10-11). Universal wisdom is beyond the grasp of humans – it is the type of knowledge that only God has. Love, on the other hand, is a universal experience with

¹⁹The Latin marginal gloss later before the Confession proper begins notes that the author takes on a persona. Paul Strohm remarks, “This short gloss contains several clues to Gower’s understanding of the role of the author-as-persona. The most obvious is that the author imagines for himself the role of Lover – the persona is fashioned or imagined, rather than simply formed through exaggeration of existing traits or worked out in performance. Furthermore, the persona illustrates the tendencies not just of a plausible other person but *aliorum* – the presumably universal traits of a plural number of other persons” (“A Note on Gower’s Persona” 294-5). Gower presents *an* individual case here; or perhaps more clearly, an individual canvas (Amans) onto which many different cases may be painted.

which all humans are familiar in some way or other. “Every kinde” further emphasizes that Love knows no boundaries; that is, it is not an experience delimited by estate.²⁰

Despite reframing the poem to be about Love, Gower immediately displays the mutability and uncontrollable nature of Love. He quickly shows that Love is wild and unpredictable in its very nature:

In which ther can no man him reule,
For loves lawe is out of reule
...
And natheles ther is no man
In al this world so wys, that can
Of love tempre the mesure,
Bot as it falth in aventure. (1.17-18,21-24)

Two important points are made clear in these lines. First, Love may not be ruled – it is mutable and fluctuates by nature. Second, wisdom has no bearing on Love. These two points in particular curiously complicate Gower’s attempt to alter the frame of his poem. To admit that Love cannot be controlled is to admit that the current attempt to frame a poem dealing with Love is as futile as his previous endeavor to write of wisdom universally, conceded as impossible in the *Prologus*. In the process of writing about Love, Gower claims that it cannot be tempered because it happens as in *aventure* – adventure that comes with its own agency. Love plays by its own rules. Furthermore, all

²⁰Interestingly, then, Love is a lot like deceit as Gower has set it up in the *Prologus*. Gower plays on this similarity throughout the first few books of the poem.

of the wisdom that Gower has established for himself as a “burel clerk”²¹ is worthless in this new endeavor. He continues,

It hath and schal ben evermor
That love is maister wher he wile,
Ther can no lif make other skile;
For wher as evere him lest to sette,
Ther is no myht which him may lette. (1.34-38)

These lines reinforce the wildness of Love. Of course, Gower is speaking about the deity of Love here (Cupid), but this anthropomorphized concept is a tool of the allegory. All men are powerless against Love and eventually must resign themselves to the “chance” and “fortune” of it (1.41, 43).

Gower’s lamentations regarding the futility of trying to fight against Love’s will, however, is yet another deceptive ploy of his framing of *Confessio*. He makes all of the above claims only to write lines later that even though he, too, is an agentless victim of love, he will tell his story as an example from which others may learn. In doing so, Gower absolves himself of the act of invention, utilizing the signal phrase tropes of romance.²² After bemoaning the chance nature of Love, the narrator recounts his personal experience:

And for to proven it is so,
I am miselven on of tho,

21 Scanlon discusses Gower’s transference of clerical to lay authority for himself (251).

22 Susan Wittig discusses the use of such tropes. Concerning this style of narration, she argues, “it is an intrinsically functional element of the work and of any utterance, a unified product of the author’s intention, the author’s sense of the audience and their expectations, and the author’s attitude toward the subject” (12). Gower, in this case, uses these tropes of romance to belie his intention – to make it appear that he does not control his poem when in fact he does.

Which to this scole am underfonge.
 For it is siththe go noght longe,
 As for to speke of this matiere,
 I may you telle, if ye woll hiere,
 A wonder hap which me befell,
 That was to me bothe hard and fell,
 Touchende of love and his fortune,
 The which me liketh to comune
 And plainly for to telle it oute. (1.61-71)

These lines mirror those that one would find in a romance – the familiar address, the passive receiving of action, the trials and tribulations, the plain language, etc. Gower alters the frame to make his poem seem to be about Love that has resulted from *aventure* and chance rather than the didactic enterprise by which it was originally situated only fifty lines earlier. That is, Gower has reframed *Confessio* to be about Love, which is a more tangible topic than wisdom, yet he will tell “his own” story and experiences (seemingly individual) with Love that happened by chance. Through these stories, Gower will employ the same didactic process concerning Love toward which he had begun to gesture in the *Prologus*. Gower attempts to make these processes seem different by couching his experiences with Love in *aventure*, but they are one in the same.²³ Gower actually clarifies his frame as he moves along, but the manner about which he does so is one of clarification by way of obfuscation – channeling the deceit he employs so often in his circular frame.

23T. Matthew N. McCabe addresses how “*Confessio* unites a specifically *public* didacticism to *poetry*” (4).

Before making his Complaint to Cupid and Venus, the narrator concludes that readers should learn from his experiences in love, but he returns to a topic which he claims to have abandoned at the beginning of this book: wisdom. Gower concludes this section:

For in good faith this wolde I rede,
That every man ensample take
Of wisdom which his is betake,
And that he wot of good aprise
To teche it forth, for such emprise
Is for to preise; *and therfore I*
Woll wryte and schewe al openly
How love and I togedre mette
Wherof the world ensample fette
Mai after this, whan I am go,
Of thilke unsely jolif wo,
Whos reule stant out of the weie,
And yet may it noght be withstonde

For oght that men may understonde. (1.78-92; italics mine)

Despite claiming to have given up on teaching wisdom to the reader of *Confessio*, Gower has returned to that topic. Even though the poem that follows will be about Love, Gower notes that his reader should take from it what wisdom he can. Gower recognizes that wisdom is too broad a subject to treat and so he decides to talk about a more approachable subject, Love, only to eventually claim that these stories about Love should

elicit examples of wisdom for the reader to learn. *Confessio* has thus been framed as a poem concerned with wisdom that employs love to discuss specific instances of wisdom. Gower is playing with his readers, then, when he notes in the quoted section above that he will openly write and show these examples because he has been obfuscating his intent all along. Clearly, nothing about this poem has been open. The frame has continually shifted, thoroughly disorienting the readers and the perspective from which they (think they) should read. But Gower embraces the deceit – that barrier for interpretation between intent and meaning – that initially problematizes his project (in the *Prologus*) and turns it into his greatest tool in the *Confessio*. By deceiving the reader about the frame of the poem – about what the poem is about, really – Gower recreates the lived experience of wisdom, love, and, overall, life, gesturing toward a warning to his reader to not believe that things are always as they seem. Gower's poem operates under the auspices of the greater good of teaching men the importance of this difference in life despite muddying the distinction in his fiction.

The Revelatory Moment and the Circular Frame

After the exempla by way of tale-telling has ceased in Book 8, Genius offers his final counsel to Amans, but Amans does not like what Genius has to say, indicating that he has not learned anything at all throughout this entire process. This lack of change in Amans both foreshadows and necessitates the revelatory moment. Amans sorely lacks the revelation of truth about love that one would hope the process of his confession would have brought him; because he cannot find revelation in his experience, it is forced upon him through literal re-vision. Amans admits to Genius that he (still) cannot grasp the relationship between reason and Love:

“Thus am I bot a lewed man.
Bot, fader, for ye ben a clerk
Of love, and this matiere is derk,
And I can evere leng the lasse,
Bot yit I mai noght let it passe,
Youre hole conseil I beseche,
That ye me be som weie teche
What is my beste, as for an ende.” (8.2052-59)

Amans, for all of the tales that he has heard, does not know how best to proceed in matters of love. That is, he may have heard all of the tales that Genius has told him, but it seems that he has not been able to make the connection between the exempla and his own life. Additionally, Amans makes the remark concerning his lack of learning in comparison to Genius’s status as a clerk, signifying the necessity that wisdom be learned to draw the correct conclusion from the stories that have been told in this learned manner.

Genius patiently summarizes everything that he has tried to show throughout the tales in his reply, but Amans cannot see outside of himself, again setting up the necessity of the revelatory moment to shift his perspective. Genius advises Amans to govern his heart by reason before he is blinded by love (8.2126-36), but he further comments, “And who that wole himself beguile, / He may the rathere be deceived” (8.2140-41), as if providing meta-commentary on *Confessio* as a whole. The element of deceit again slithers into the picture: Genius’s lines imply that Amans (and the reader) sees what he wants to see – his ignorance is willful. Amans, still in his limited perspective of himself, counters Genius’s argument with the tried and true, if petulant, “You just don’t

understand me.” Amans makes this contradiction a matter of *kinde* – the lover v. the priest:

The hert which fre goth on the launde
Not of an oxe what him eileth;
It falleth ofte a man merveileth
Of that he seth an other fare,
Bot if he knewe himself the fare,
And felt it as it is in soth,
He scholde don riht as he doth,
Or elles werse in his degré[.] (8.2160-67)

The *non-lover* is free to roam like a hart, but the lover is a domesticated ox, under the yoke of love and lacking freedom. Amans’s conclusion, essentially, encapsulates the problematic interpretations that he has made throughout the poem: seeing is not understanding – only experiencing is understanding. Ironically, Amans does not understand that he is guilty of the very crime he accuses Genius. Again, these lines demonstrate that the problem lies in the contradiction between act and intent.

To rectify this contradiction, Gower uses the revelatory moment to collapse the persona of his poem back into one person: the old John Gower. Amans makes his supplication to Venus and Cupid, removing the intermediary of the priest, Genius. In direct interaction with Venus, then, Amans reveals himself as John Gower and simultaneously undoes his separate persona:

So as I myhte, under a tre
To grounde I fell upon mi kne,

And preide hire for to do me grace:

Sche caste hire chiere upon mi face,

And as it were halving a game

Sche axeth me what is mi name.

“Ma dame,” I seide, “John Gower.” (8.2315-21; emphasis mine)

Venus is described acting in jest or playing along with a childish fantasy through which she has seen since its inception. Even though Gower has been able to fool himself and his readers into believing Amans as a separate person, Venus has known all along that it has been John Gower. She asks the question only out of charity or pity for the old man’s delusional fantasy. This revelatory moment outs Amans as John Gower – he was John Gower from the poem’s beginning. And this John Gower is not *the* John Gower – he remains a persona. Strohm discusses the importance of Gower’s persona, concluding, “our enjoyment of *Confessio Amantis* [is] sharpened by the interplay of Gower as Amans, Gower as Poet or *auctor* of the *presens libellus*, and the historical John Gower” (“A Note on Gower’s Persona” 295). This shift presents the reader with a persona that has a more specific identity, a man with a proper rather than allegorical name. He is *a* John Gower – specifically an old poet who desperately wishes to be a lover but who, as Venus will judge, no longer has the youthful body capable of love. The revelation here is multi-leveled: first, within the poem, the allegorical scheme of the confession is broken and old John Gower as Amans is forced to reoccupy his present self – the persona of the old poet. That is, Gower – the actual poet – can no longer limit the poem’s perspective to the youthful lover now that Venus openly acknowledges (and reveals to the reader) that Amans is anything but. Second, the reader realizes that this confession has been a ruse all

along – Amans’s confession has actually been the old John Gower’s confession. This second point does not undo the reader’s interpretation of what she has read; rather, it points to the mutability of the poem that mirrors the mutability of life. The reader’s experience reading *Confessio* shifts as the poem shifts: mutability, here, is constructive, creating layered meaning rather than collapsing it.

This revelation that Amans has been old John Gower begets a greater revelation for the reader: upon realizing that this confession has been a literary rather than literal enterprise, the reader must reassess her own interpretations because the frame through which she had read has been changed at its very end. This reassessment is the structural exemplum of *Confessio Amantis*. The revelatory moment places the deceived reader alongside the self-deceiving John Gower. Both perspectives have been limited throughout the poem, but this retrospective emendation invites the reader to reconsider what he has read. When Venus tells John Gower that he is excused from her court, she forgives his transgression and promises to heal him of his “unsely jolif wo” that burns in his heart (8.2350-61). Venus concludes that he deserves no more than healing:

“For in the plit which I thee finde,
So as mi court it hath awarded,
Thou schalt be duely rewarded;
And if thou woldest more crave,
It is no riht that thou it have.” (8.2372-76)

John Gower will be rewarded for the complaint that he has brought to Venus and her court; apparently, the confession that he has put forward has not been all for naught. This reward doubles for the reader; lest he think all he has read through the initial frame is

fruitless, Venus's lines here reassure that his efforts, too, have not been in vain. The revelatory moment refocuses the frame, and the rest of the poem plays out specifically for Gower the poet to work through this shift for the reader. It also displays openly the deception that Gower has employed in the framing of *Confessio* and has warned his reader against throughout the poem. The failing of the reader to recognize the deception of this frame despite being warned time and again is akin to the failing of John Gower to accept his age and to acknowledge that he cannot enter Love's court. Just as Venus greets Gower's failing with kindness, Gower treats the reader's failing with equal benevolence. His critique is almost a fatherly reproach; he acknowledges his culpability in the reader's failing, but the revelatory moment imposes the retrospective reconsideration necessary in confession.

The revelatory moment begins the gesture back to the beginning of the poem, but the remainder of the poem after this moment also plays a role in this movement. The process that old John Gower undergoes is, on some level, a model for the same process that the reader must undergo. A poem that began under the auspices of a young man's confession and education in love has become an old man's denied entry into the court of love.²⁴ Venus chides Gower:

“And thogh thou feigne a yong corage,
It scheweth wel be the visage
That olde grisel is no fole:
There ben ful manye yeeres stole
With thee and with suche other mo,

²⁴ There is more than some irony here that this confession has taken so long that even if he had been a young man at the start he would now be old.

That outward feignen youthe so

And ben withinne of pore assay.” (8.2405-11; emphasis mine)

Gower is an old man and he should not be attempting to act like a young man. The lines that I emphasize return to the theme of deception. Gower is guilty twofold of deception: on one hand, he has attempted to deceive Venus in the poem. More importantly, he has deceived his reader into believing that he could educate them on love. Despite all of this deception in play, though, Venus points out that there has been much learned during this process:

“Mi sone, if thou be wel bethought,

This toucheth thee; forget it noght:

The thing is torned into was;

That which was whilom grene gras,

Is welked hey at time now.

Forthi mi conseil is that thou

Remembre wel hou thou art old.” (8.2433-39)

She advises Gower to not forget the past; rather, he must remember the past because of its importance to the present. The final line here indicates that Gower remember that he is old, but it specifically demands that he remember *how* he has become old. This directive implies wisdom is gained in this way. The experiences that he has had through his life merit reflection; in fact, that is what *Confessio* expresses to its reader through the revelatory moment – the need for reflection.

This need for reflection takes a literal turn in the poem when Venus holds a mirror before John Gower and he sees that he has, indeed, become old. This curious move asks

John Gower to trust one of the senses that from the beginning of the poem has been most suspect: sight. John Gower's reaction to seeing himself in the mirror uses his physical rejection of his current reflection to motivate him into a reflection of his life. That is, the disgust at the outward appearance forces John Gower inward to reflect on the memories of his life:

Mi will was tho to se no more
Outwith, for ther was no pleasance;
And thane into my remembrance
I drowh myn olde daies passed,
And as reson it hath compassed,
I made a liknesse of miselve
Unto the sondri monthes twelve,
Wherof the yeer in his astat
Is mad, and stant upon debat,
That lich til other non acordeth. (8.2832-41)

John Gower, now old, decides to reflect on his life and to organize it into the seasons of the year. He projects an image of himself according to each season of his life. This process moves John Gower out of the rule of Love and into the rule of Reason. Through reflection, Gower enables reason to come to him and to cure him of his malady "So that of thilke fyri peine / I was mad aobre and hol ynowh" (8.2868-69). This episode enacts, in miniature, what the framing of the poem as a whole enacts upon its reader, providing a space for reflection that will lead to the action necessary to invite reason.

The penance that John Gower receives from Venus (after he has reflected on his “sins”) symbolizes the penance for the reader who has been deceived throughout the poem. John Gower’s greatest sin, it would seem, is pretending to be something that he is not, and my argument elucidates the resonance of this sin in the framing structures of the *Confessio*. Gower’s poem presents itself and mediates itself to its reader in a way that makes it about what it *is not*, necessitating the reflection that John Gower models at the end of Book 8. For example, the disparity between the *Prologus*’s focus on wisdom and then the rest of the poem’s focus on love dissolves with eventual reflection. Genius supposedly absolves John Gower:

The prest anon was redy tho,
And seide, “Sone, as of thi schrifte
Thou hast ful pardoun and forgifte;
Forget it thou, and so wol I.” (8.2894-97)

Genius pardons John Gower of his sins, but his last line is somewhat confusing. He essentially says, “If you forget it, I will, too.” This remark does not seem to connote absolution as much as it does a mutual agreement to forget. Nowhere in these lines does Genius employ the language of confession to suggest that John Gower has been absolved of his sins; rather, Genius merely agrees to let John Gower’s shrift, as it were, pass. John Gower again asks mercy and goes to leave when Venus stops him:

Bot sche, that wolde make an ende,
As therto which I was most able,
A peire of bedes blak as sable
Sche tok and heng my necke aboute;

Upon the gaudes al withoute
Was write of gold, *Por reposer*.
“Lo,” thus sche seide, “John Gower,
Now thou art ate laste cast,
This have I for thin ese cast,
That thou no more of love sieche.
Bot my will is that thou besieche
And preie hierafter for the pes[.] (8.2902-13)

The phrase “*Por reposer*” inscribed on the rosary is commonly translated meaning “for repose” or “for rest.” Read in this way, Venus directs John Gower to cease his attempts at love in vain and to instead rest his old body. However, the directive that follows suggests that repose is not simply rest; rather, repose signifies a cessation of loving and an initiation of another action – contemplation. Rather than seek love, Venus instructs Gower to pray for peace in quiet contemplation, reflecting on the wisdom he has gained through the poem.

The contemplation that Venus suggests John Gower undertake models the act of interpretation that Gower puts forth for his reader to consider. As seen throughout the poem, confession requires recollection and contemplation. When Genius asks Amans whether he is guilty of a sin, Amans works through both of these mental processes. When John Gower asks for absolution, Venus directs him to look back on his confession and to contemplate the process. Like Amans and John Gower, the reader of *Confessio* must recollect what he has read in the poem and then contemplate it in light of the revelatory moment in order to determine the best interpretation. Venus suggests as much to John

Gower when she tells him to let reason – not Love – be his guide lest “he may sone himself misguide, / That seth noght the peril tofore” (8.2920-21). Venus’s lines suggest that if one lets Love be his guide in interpretation, he will be deceived. Rather than invalidating the eight books of poetry delineating the sins of love, however, Venus advocates a shift in John Gower’s focus as he contemplates:

“Mi sone, be wel war therefore,
And kep the sentence of my lore
And tarie thou mi court no more,
Bot go ther vertu moral duelleth,
Wher ben thi bokes, as men telleth,
Which of long time thou hast write.” (8.2922-27)

Venus advises John Gower to remember the sentence – the lesson – of the stories that he (as Amans) has heard throughout *Confessio*. The exempla are not lost because they were told in a misleading manner; rather, the lessons remain even if they are not related to gaining entrance to the court of Love – there is a universal applicability to them. Finally, the last line indicates that John Gower the poet has known the books from which such virtuous morals may be derived and that he has written about these books himself. These lines suggest that, for the reader, there are morals to be gleaned from all of Gower’s works, including *Confessio*, if he, the reader, reads using wisdom. The revelatory moment of the poem, then, not only reveals Amans as Gower, but it also moves the reader to contemplate what she has read in light of the revelation that it is wisdom for which she should read, not love.

The final 232 lines of *Confessio* illustrate John Gower refocusing his work to meet the newly set requirements of Venus as part of his penance. This shift carries through what begins with the revelatory moment. John Gower is no longer Amans concerned with Venus's Court of Love; he is now, again, John Gower the poet, advocating reason. The frame has returned to its original intent, in its circularity mirroring the process of confession that the poem has lain out. Rather than praying for Love, John Gower now prays for "good governance" and "unité" (8.2987, 2989). His prayer at the end of the poem is for England as a whole, returning to the theme of the destructive nature of division:

Which many a noble worthi toun

Fro welthe and fro prosperité

Hath brought to gret adversité.

So were it good to ben al on,

For mechil grace ther upon

Unto the citees shulde falle[.] (8.3042-47)

Gower advocates here the idea of common profit over the individual.²⁵ The frame plays a crucial role in coupling the elements of this dichotomy and promulgating the notion that individual unity may enable collective unity. The revelation of the circular frame is that seeking success in a singular enterprise, love, is not beneficial in a lasting way. In unity, there is grace; in division, despair.

Gower ends *Confessio* calling upon his reader to embrace a type of love, charity, which will lead to wisdom. Before reaching this conclusion, though, he bids farewell to

²⁵ See Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*. Peck demonstrates the theme of common profit again and again in the stories of *Confessio*.

his book. He places his farewell to his book before his final farewell as a way of drawing attention to his poetic accomplishment while at the same time feigning humility. Gower writes,

And now to speke as in final,
Touchende that y undirtok
In Englesch for to make a book
Which stant betwene ernest and game,
I have it maad as thilke same
Which axe for to ben excusid,
And that my bok be nought refused
Of lered men, whanne their it se,
For lak of curiosité[.] (8.3106-14)

He admits that his poem has been both serious and playful – he has been engaging in play on some level throughout the entire poem. Gauging what is earnest and what is game is the task of the reader, but, at the same time, Gower seems to acknowledge the possibility of both earnest *and* game in the way that he frames the poem. The circular frame, after all, is the most playful element of *Confessio*. The last two lines in the quoted section ask for tolerance for Gower’s lack of “subtle learning” (Gower 226n21), which is certainly meant to elicit a laugh from the careful reader. Gower’s work is subtle (at least) if not downright *sly* in its execution. He leads his reader into the misreading of the poem by using a persona of himself to model such acts.

Despite his protestations otherwise, Gower has been able to touch on the wisdom that he earlier claimed to be out of his hand's reach, but only after he had revealed himself as old. He concludes that he will no longer write about love:

Which many an herte hath overtake,
And ovyrturnd as the blynde
Fro reson into lawe of kynde;
Wher as the wisdom goth aweie
And can nought se the rythe weie
How to governe his oghne estat,
Bot everyday stant in debat
Withinne himself, and can nought leve. (8.3144-51)

These are the effects of love, and Gower has accomplished exactly what he said he was unable to do at the beginning of the poem. What we see, then, is that Gower has been dealing with wisdom all along. His poetic conceit that wisdom is too weighty and that love is more common has resulted in a dangerous, harmful way of reading that neglects both the body and society. With the revelatory moment, however, Gower remedies the effects of misguided reading by modeling the right way to read. The wisdom of *Confessio* lies in its imposition of a reading process through its circular framing. Wisdom is found in what is read, yes, but wisdom, *Confessio Amantis* shows its reader, is more often found in *how* something is read.

Reading Anew in *Confessio*: A Case Study of Detraction in Book 2, "The Tale of Demetrius and Perseus"

The revelatory moment in *Confessio Amantis* asks the reader to reconsider what she has already read and, in doing so, to revise the context in which she has already (once) read it. The revelatory moment completes the circular frame of the poem and allows for Gower's larger point to be expressed, but it also deconstructs the original model of a lover's confession in the process. The reader now knows that Amans is actually a poetic persona of Gower, and so the original "confession" becomes just another literary device to allow the story to progress and to showcase Gower's poetic prowess. Rather than creating a poem about love *or* about wisdom, Gower has crafted a poem in *Confessio* that allows the reader to find both. Genius's didactic glossing of each story that he tells becomes, in a sense, comic when the reader returns to the story and reads it herself for something other than the, often far-fetched, moral about love. In rereading, the reader is able to consider the tales alone, free of didactic posturing. To demonstrate how rereading may alter the interpretation of the tales that Gower includes in his poem, I will demonstrate how an alternative interpretation to Genius's may result.

In Book 2 of *Confessio*, Genius tells Amans the Tale of Demetrius and Perseus to illustrate what becomes of a person who uses detraction to try to win a lady's love. Demetreus and Perseus are brothers, but Demetrius was "The betre knyht" (2.1622), which causes Perseus to envy him (2.1626-31). Perseus detracts from his brother's reputation while he is away at war in order to cause their father, King Philippe, to doubt Demetrius and to throw him into jail (2.1653-89). Demetrius is brought before a judge, who Perseus "mad favorable" (2.1697), found guilty of treason, and beheaded (2.1702-

03). Eventually, Perseus seizes the government while his father is overcome by despair (2.1749-51), but Perseus then, after failing in war with Rome, eventually starves as a prisoner in exile (2.1816-56). Genius glosses the tale to show to Amans what happens to a man “Which hinder wole another with” (2.1863) because of the eventual downfall that Perseus experiences. Even though this gloss could be applied to a number of scenarios, Amans, through Genius’s structuring of the confession, interprets this message through the lens of love and then asks, “Bot of Envie, / If ther be more in his baillie / Towardes love, sai me what” (2.1869-71). The other implications of the tale are left unaddressed by Genius, and Amans, who has yielded interpretive control to Genius, does not allow himself to interpret the tale that he has just been told from any other perspectives.

After reading the entire poem, though, and discovering the circular frame that encourages retrospective reading, the reader of *Confessio* understands that there is more to this tale than what Genius glosses. Gower’s tale presents Perseus’s detraction of Demetrius as a crime against God because of the deceit that Perseus uses to do so. Detraction is only one of Perseus’s sins, and Gower makes clear that God will not tolerate such evil men. However, the onus of interpretation falls equally on the one being told the tale. The poem highlights Perseus’s deception, describing Perseus’s “tunge of pestilence, / With false words whiche he feigneth / Upon his oghne brother pleigneth” (2.1648-50). However, after Perseus tells his tale, King Philippe accepts it without considering whether Perseus may be lying. Philippe clearly knows the prowess and loyalty of Demetrius, who is away fighting for him, but he never doubts what Perseus tells him:

The kinge upon this tale ansuerde

And seide, if this thing which he herde

Be soth and mai be broght to prove,
“It schal noght be to his behove,
Which so hath schapen ous the werste,
For he himself schal be the ferste
That schal be ded, if that I mai.” (2.1671-77)

King Philippe does not suspect Perseus’s deception, nor does he consider what Perseus is telling him about Demetrius against what he knows to be true about Demetrius. Philippe, to his credit, insists on a trial, but his lack of awareness to the power of deception undermines the process of justice that he sets in motion by believing Perseus.

After Demetrius returns, Perseus retells his accusation in front of him, but Philippe does not ask Demetrius for an explanation. Instead, Philippe foolishly leaves Demetrius’s guilt or innocence in the hands of a judge who Perseus has corrupted. Gower demonstrates here that both lords and the law are susceptible to deception and lies:

Thus stod the trowthe under the charge,
And the falshede goth at large,
Which thurgh behest hath overcome
The greteste of the lordes some,
That privelich of his accord
Thei stoned as witenesse of record:
The jugge was mad favorable;
Thus was the lawe deceivable
So ferforth that the trowthe fond
Rescousse non, and thus the lond

Forth with kind deceived were. (2.1691-1701)

The lords who have been deceived should stand as examples to us so that we do not fall victim to the same deception. Truth alone cannot save someone when deception goes undetected and unchecked. Moreover, Gower points out that even the law may be deceived if the men who have been put in place to uphold it are corrupt and create a justice system that will allow for such antics.

Gower uses this scenario in which both men and the law have been deceived to show that it is often difficult to recognize deception as it happens; however, God is always aware of such acts. After Demetrius is tried and killed and Perseus seizes control of the government, King Philippe falls into despair:

The lond was torned up so down,
Whereof his herte is so distraught,
That he for pure sorwe hath caght
The maladie of which nature

In queint in every creature. (2.1744-48)

On one hand, Philippe may be grieving over his son who he wrongly killed. Yet, he also despairs because he has failed to realize that his own son, Perseus, has deceived him in order to achieve power. Philippe, then, serves as a model for the reader. Vigilance must be exercised while interpreting a story (text) so that one is always aware of potential falsehood, manipulation, etc. This moment illustrates the limited perspectives that humans often have, but God is beyond such limitations. Gower presents God's omniscience through a prophecy that a Roman consul, Paul Emilius, interprets from his daughter's dog's (named Perse) death:

With that he pulleth up his hed
And made riht a glad visage,
And seide how that was a presage
Touchende unto that other Perse,
Of that fortune him scholde adverse,
He seith, for such a prenostik
Most of an hound was to him lik:
For as it is an houndes kinde
To berke upon a man behinde,
Riht so behind his brother bak
With false wordes whiche he spak
He hath do slain, and that is rowthe.
“Bot he which hateth alle untrowthe,
The hihe God, it schal redresse;
For so my dowther prophetesse
Forthi with hir litel houndes deth
Betokneth.” . . . (2.1788-1804)

In addition to God’s omniscience, though, Gower also points to the beastly nature of deception in order to tacitly argue that man should use his abilities to see through such language. In this sense, God is the omniscient God of wisdom, but God is also the epitome of an active, aware reader in this case. Paul displays his own reading prowess, too, by interpreting Perse’s death as portending the Greeks’ defeat at the hands of the Romans.

Gower anticipates, in this moment, the rereading of this tale – the first-time readers of the poem were in the same place as those deceived by Perseus in this tale. But, reading the tale again, the message concerning deceit becomes clearer through a newfound critical reading practice. It is fitting that Perseus, when he is exiled, wanders “in a povere wede” (2.1847). After his deception has been exposed through the readers’ education – within and outside of the tale – he physically marks his crime by attempting to look like someone other than he is in the same way that he used his false words to present his brother as someone he was not – namely, a traitor. The wisdom that God has that allows him to know deceit even when everyone else is fooled, then, *is* available to humans (albeit at a lesser level). Through retrospective reading, these messages are more apparent. They were available avenues for interpretation all along, but reading the poem again for wisdom makes them especially clear. Gower’s circular frame invites such rereading, and opens up a number of interpretive possibilities for each of the tales in his compilation. *Confessio* reveals itself as Gower’s *magnum opus* in so doing. Reading creates meaning in *Confessio*, yet Gower’s poem reserves a storehouse of meanings that can only be accessed by the reader who knows for what to look and how to read.

Chapter Two. Framing the Material Memory of Margery Kempe's *Book*

Margery Kempe's *Book* is hailed as many things: the first autobiography written in English, a vernacular devotional manual, a proto-feminist work (the "real" Wife of Bath), etc. Even though all of these "what's" are interesting in their own right, Margery Kempe's *Book* is not a text that interests me for its "what" – it interests me for its profoundly original *how*. Margery Kempe, with whom we can without doubt credit the invention of her *Book* despite past dissenting opinions, creates her text with a rhetorical acumen that has been overlooked and/or ignored for many years while critics instead worried over "recovering" who Margery Kempe was and whether the events described were real. Thankfully, the scholarship surrounding this text has shifted from the latter inquiry, but critics insist on attempting to figure out an identity for this mercantile class, unorthodox mystic of Lynn. Really, it is impossible to pin down just one identity for such a volatile figure, and the text that she leaves us is the richer for it. Readers' difficulty in determining who Margery Kempe was stems directly from the way in which she presents her text. By privileging her memories and by situating her text within the discourses of contemplative writing, Margery creates two equally important framing devices that trouble any strict definition of Margery or her text.

Margery Kempe's *Book* uses two specific frames. First, the prologue frames all of the events in the text through Margery's memory, privileging the act of remembering over the act of recording. Remembering, in this case, differs from recording in that remembering implies an order chosen by the author, Margery, rather than the writing down of events as they actually occurred – what modern parlance might misname "history." Second, Margery uses the episodic nature of hagiography and contemplative

writing to present a specific version of this memory. This first frame is an exterior frame that serves to establish the text's creation through memory and the unique authorial voice that Margery Kempe exercises through a scribe. The second frame is a type of temporal frame through which the recorded episodes of Margery Kempe's life exist in an ever-present now that is organized through her experiences in a world of economics and Christian materiality. Through both levels of framing in her *Book*, Margery presents her memory of herself, her actions, and her world. This framing recreates reality as she wants her readers to perceive it and it welcomes readers into an affective experience of Margery's bodily and spiritual experiences. At the same time, however, this framing opens up possibilities of interpretation for readers. Margery equates the material experiences with the spiritual experiences remembered in her text through her use of both frames. As a result, the readers of her text may find a number of insights into mysticism, contemplative writing, middle class economics in the fifteenth century, Christian materiality, etc.

Two Frames: Authorizing Memory (Prologue) and Contemplative Writing

The prologue to Margery Kempe's *Book* is the first frame of the text. It presents the text that follows as Margery's memory of important events that are organized to suit the narrative of her development as a mystic rather than to present a historical record. Margery admits, "Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme and þe ordyr whan thyngs befellyn" (5). The text that follows is not meant to be a history of events in the order in which they happened; rather, Margery explains that what follows will be *her* memory of events.

Margery's move here is in order to establish her authority over her text.²⁶ Lynn Staley differentiates between "Margery, the subject, and Kempe her author," adding that Kempe makes this move to assert control over her text: "Authorial efforts to control texts were even more difficult for little-known figures or for women such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe" (3, 20). Rather than divide the memory of Margery from the author, Kempe, though, I contend that we must always consider Margery Kempe as a whole person whose past and present are always in dialogue.

The second type of frame that Margery employs in her *Book* is its generic presentation as hagiography and/or mystical writing²⁷ that is markedly situated in the cultural and economic contexts of fifteenth-century England. This second frame is slightly more complicated in that the cultural and economic currents of late medieval England clearly inform Margery's presentation of these episodes of remembered mystical experience within her *Book*. Interestingly, however, the resonance of Margery's culture and community within her text makes sense within the genre of contemplative writing that, as Nicholas Watson observes, "is a record of individual religious experience" (3). Watson continues, "Reports of individual experiences feel immediate, even when they are centuries in the past . . . Despite the theoretical problems associated with using texts as windows that open onto experience, especially individual experience . . . elements of

²⁶ I should note here that authority should not be confused with *auctoritas*. Mary Carruthers rightly points out that "both 'authority' and 'author' were conceived of entirely in textual terms, for an 'auctor' is simply one whose writings are full of 'authorities.' And an 'author' acquires 'authority' only by virtue of having his works retained 'sententialiter' in the memories of subsequent generations" (190). I refer to Margery's authority in the text, then, inasmuch as she controls its words/signs.

²⁷ To simplify matters, I will refer to this genre of writing as contemplative writing, which has become the critically-preferred terminology to discuss such a multi-faceted genre. Vincent Gillespie explains, "The lives, longings, and textual explorations that were engendered by the perception of such [mystical] experiences are better described as taking place within the *contemplative life*, their spiritual aspirations yearning towards states of *contemplation* (in which mystical experience, it was hoped, occur) and their struggles to articulate these complex and interrelated states resulting in *contemplative texts*" (i).

this approach remains [sic] indispensable to any study of contemplative writing” (3).

Margery’s *Book* may not serve as a window into the fifteenth century *per se*, but we must take into consideration how her individual experience as a woman in that period relates to the contemplative writing that she produces. As Karma Lochrie notes, “the woman writer’s task of adopting a language must be viewed specifically within her historical and cultural context. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is positioned within her historical and cultural context” (2). Despite the fact that many of Margery’s critics question the validity of her text because of the overwhelming individualism at its center – that is, Margery Kempe the living and breathing human – such individualism serves to validate Margery’s experiences by insisting on her unique experiencing of them. In order to better understand Margery’s rhetorical practices in her *Book*, my analysis of this second frame will use the influence of Christian materiality (including relic discourse) and the economic practices of the fifteenth-century Lynn (and England) to inform the interpretation of her framing of her work through contemplative writing.

Christian Materiality, Relic Discourse, and Merchant-class Economics

Material objects surrounded people of the Middle Ages much in the same way that they surround us today. These material objects often took on a symbolic meaning of one sort or another. In a world that looked to the next life as the release of one’s burden or as the paradise to the earthly toil that one endured, the issue of how to connect this world to the next was undoubtedly of constant concern for both religious authorities and laypeople. The problem of how to realize a spirituality (that often rejects the body) in a world of materiality seems to have been solved by imbuing certain material objects with spiritual meaning. A material object that belonged to or came into contact with a person

of renowned holiness became a symbolic representation of that person; however, this practice seems to have led, as it often does, to making the symbolic representation holy in and of itself. (In other words, the signifier is granted the same status as the signified when they clearly are not equal.) What is more, who decides or proves what constitutes a holy object only grew more muddled as the Middle Ages progressed. The Church eventually attempts to reign in what material objects may be deigned holy – relics, as it were. The problem remains, though, that laypeople had already learned to read material objects as symbolic representations of spiritual power, and once this way of reading had begun, it seems that the Church had only ineffective reactionary measures to attempt to mediate it.

The crux of the issue of holy matter is *how* matter becomes holy matter: it is a question of both reading and authorization. Caroline Bynum Walker discusses the difficulty of authorization in regard to holy matter:

[I]t was almost impossible for church leaders and theologians to avoid the issue of holy matter. The transformed statues, chalices, wafers, cloths, relics, and even mounds of earth to which the faithful made pilgrimage in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries presented a challenge that was theoretical as well as practical for a religion that held that the entire material world was created by and and could therefore manifest God. Secondly – and ironically – Cusanus's²⁸ approval of supposedly transformed objects rested on the claim to miraculous changelessness: the hosts' supposed resistance to the natural processes of decay and fragmentation. Issues of how matter behaved, both ordinarily and miraculously, when in contact with an infinitely powerful and ultimately

28 Nicholas of Cusa, a papal legate (Bynum *Christian Materiality* 15).

unknowable God were key to devotion and theology. The God who lay beyond the world in unimaginable and unanalyzable darkness or light was also a God to whom substance (in the Eucharist) and even whose particles (in blood relics) might be present on earth. (Bynum *Christian Materiality* 17)

God's presence on earth in material objects seems to be determined by the transformation of these objects. For an object to be authorized as holy matter, it must display something out of the ordinary – it cannot simply retain the characteristics of the material(s) of which it is made. Authorization of matter as holy rests in the reading of this matter.

Immediately, then, arises the problem of who authorizes matter as holy. Objects were able to be read by people in the Middle Ages as holy without requiring any authority to tell them it was so or *how* it was so. The very material itself became holy, indicated an other-worldliness that people read as a means to interact with the other world – heaven. Many men and women may not have been capable (or allowed) to read and to interpret the Bible for themselves, but they were more than capable of interpreting objects to be holy in one way or another.

Christian materiality, then, is an important context from which people interpret material objects in the later Middle Ages. This context plays a large role in how people read objects and even each other's actions, and Margery uses this context to affect the framing of her *Book* as contemplative writing. Bynum discusses the differing practices of categorization for the Middle Ages:

In contrast to the modern tendency to draw sharp distinctions between animal, vegetable, and mineral or between animate and inanimate, the

natural philosophers of the Middle Ages understood matter as the locus of generation and corruption. Although questions of the difference between living and nonliving and worries about decay and dissolution were common, the basic way of describing matter – the default language, so to speak, into which theorists tended to slip – was to see it as organic, fertile, and in some sense alive. (*Christian Materiality* 30)

This flexibility of categories makes reading an interesting task for the observer and is of particular significance within the context of Christian materiality. Because an object may be one thing and also another, the interpretive power of the viewer is enhanced – objects may be read as holy by a person even if those objects lack direct authorization.

Authorization of matter as holy or not holy becomes especially vexed when we consider this dynamic of reading. When the viewer/reader participates in authorizing and interpreting material objects, the holiness of an object begins to rely more on whether people believe it to be holy rather than what the Church claims. Margery Kempe works within this flexibility of reading and the difficulty of authorization in the way she fashions her body in her *Book*. Margery fashions her body within the framework of Christian materiality so that she may take advantage of this tenuous relationship of reading and authorization. Although she was formerly a businesswoman and proud member of the upper class of Lynn, she refashions her body as a holy body. She manifests this inward change by changing her clothing – in other words, she draws attention to the very materiality of her body to show her detractors that she has become something else. Bynum notes the need for matter (bodies) to physically transform to be

considered holy (*Christian Materiality* 32), and Margery achieves this transformation in her presentation of her body.

In transforming her body through its presentation in her *Book*, Margery engages the discourse surrounding relics in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. She becomes, in essence, a living relic.²⁹ Through this engagement, Margery's *Book* exploits the rhetorical moves available to the ways in which relics are presented and/or are interpreted. This discourse plays a large role in how Margery conceives her *Book* and what function it performs in retelling her experiences. Relic discourse, according to Robyn Malo, is "the technical terminology, together with the metaphors and commonplaces, that writers in the later Middle Ages drew upon to construct the meaning of relics, usually . . . to affirm their importance" (5-6). Relic discourse engages the material culture of the Middle Ages – the shrines and relics as well as people's responses to them. Patrick J. Geary demonstrates the reader-centric interpretation of these materials when he writes, "Although symbolic objects, they are of the most arbitrary kind, passively reflecting only exactly so much meaning as they were given by a particular community" (5). In addition to this tenuous relationship between object and meaning was the further complication of the shrine or feretory that housed the relic. Malo notes, "The vehicle (the shrine) . . . could distract visitors from the tenor (the saint)" (23). This recognition indicates that the process of interpreting a relic often was a matter of reading, but the problem becomes how to know what to read when, more often than not, the relic itself was invisible if not absent (Malo 31). Moreover, "the adornment of reliquaries is entirely incommensurate with what is inside. Translation and enshrinement thus efface what the relic has in

²⁹ I concede that relics are usually matter or objects that once were alive rather than living, but I believe that this perspective brings us a fuller and/or richer understanding of how Margery's second frame functions using the discourses available to her in the fifteenth century.

common with the supplicant: the body, the inevitability of decay, and the promise of resurrection” (Malo 50). A further complication of reading relics arises through this mediation – “the relic, ever hidden, at a remove from what the pilgrim sees, points more to a man-made object (the shrine) than to God. The relic, then, functions recursively, gesturing back to this world rather than to the next” (Malo 80). Rather than serve its supposed purpose of moving its viewer to think of God, the unseen relic points the reader’s gaze back to the artifice that houses it.

Margery’s *Book* functions in a similar manner to the shrines of relics. Because the relic itself cannot control the ways in which its viewers will interpret it, the relic requires another device or structure to do so. Geary addresses this issue at length:

Moreover, unlike a book or illustration, a relic cannot itself transmit this perception from one community to another, even if these communities share identical cultural and religious values. In order to effect this transmission, something essentially extraneous to the relic itself must be provided: a reliquary with an inscription or iconographic representation of the saint, a document attesting to its authenticity, or a tradition, oral or written, which identified this particular object with a specific individual or at least with a specific type of individual (a saint). (6)

In this case, Margery’s *Book* – the contemplative writing concerning her experiences – directs readers how to interpret the relic, Margery, within. Margery’s experience may only be accessed – may only be viewed – through the mediation of her text, and like the reader of the relic-via-shrine, the reader of Margery-via-text cannot help but to attend to Margery through the text. Margery’s life is perpetually mediated for the reader by the

text, and it is only through the performance that the text preserves that we can know the ways in which Margery acted. This may seem normal for autobiography, but Margery clearly presents her text as contemplative writing that someone else (her scribe) has written about her. However, as discussed earlier, Margery uses this generic expectation as part of her framing. In reality, she controls her text, controlling thereby the memory that it preserves for its reader. Malo discusses agency in regard to literary relics by way of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*:

[I]n *Troilus and Criseyde*, relic discourse can enrich our understanding of the poem's focus on issues of meditation and enclosure. The most influential critical responses to Criseyde have focused on her agency. I extend this debate by pointing out that in the context of relic discourse, we can understand Criseyde as a kind of relic, and thus as simultaneously having and not having power. Criseyde as relic – as saint – possesses the authority vested in a saint and her body parts; but she, like a saint's relic, is nevertheless delimited by what is said and written about her (primarily by Pandarus). Her position as a relic enables us to understand Troilus as a religious supplicant and Pandarus as a parodic relic custodian. (128)

Interestingly, Margery is in a similar role within her *Book* to that of Criseyde in Chaucer's poem; however, the crucial difference between Margery and Criseyde is that Margery also *writes* her story. Thus, Margery, as author of the text, serves the role of relic custodian as she frames her experiences through the text that she presents to her reader. As relic custodian, Margery controls the ways in which the reader experiences the always present actions recalled.

Even though Margery uses contemplative writing to remember the changed presentation of her body as a living relic, the economic language that she uses within her *Book* and the exchange relationships in which she participates as a mystic demonstrate her roots in the mercantile middle class of fifteenth-century Lynn. We should be surprised at such a development from an uncloistered woman of the mercantile middle class in England during the late Middle Ages. Margery finds an economic model in the Church's practice of selling indulgences (Williams 90). She cannot absolve sins, but her communications with Christ and other venerable saints place her in an intermediary role within her text. Margery becomes a living relic in this intercessory position between the mortal and immortal. She expects payment for her services just as the Church expects payment for indulgences or alms for saying a mass for the good of one's soul. Furthermore, Margery frames her visions as commodities that she can exchange for other commodities (money, food, shelter, etc.) with others around her, but she also postures herself as a commodity desired by Christ within the contemplative writing genre. To aid her presentation as a relic, she places herself within a paradigm in which her love is desired by Christ as much and more as she desires His love, and she describes her visions through economic imagery and metaphors because such language is a familiar means of making the intangible tangible. Margery's second frame naturally positions her at the center of her *Book*. She becomes the focus of her visions in a system of economic exchange in which she is the intermediary – the middlewoman – between humankind and Christ: she exchanges her love of Christ revealed by thinking on His Passion for ethereal visions to exchange with people for worldly goods. Those people Margery encounters on Earth desire what she can tell them of Heaven, and, perhaps paradoxically, Christ in

Heaven desires Margery's love from Earth. In both situations, Margery's text uses this economic language to make clear her importance in this role.

Margery's position in Lynn is of the elite mercantile class, and it is from this economic position that Margery interprets and then presents herself in her *Book*. Kate Parker describes Margery's governing class status:

The governing class of Lynn, of which Margery was part, had become masters at manipulating a complex structure of balance and counterbalance between powerful external interests. In Margery's lifetime these relationships were at first brilliantly manipulated to the town's advantage, not least by her own father. Later, national events were to exert insupportable stresses which caused seismic shifts in the erstwhile certainties of Lynn society. Margery was the product, at least in part, of these contexts. (57)

Margery is no stranger to manipulation, as we will see in her text; furthermore, it is clear that she actively manipulates the readers of her text through the framing devices discussed here. Yet Margery also experienced the stress that resulted from political events outside of her control. Parker goes on to argue that Margery uses her hardships from the fallout of these political events as an entry point into her contemplative turn (69-72); that is, these events inform her language of identification, such as “wretched creature” (72). By remembering herself as a victim of circumstances and an outsider, Margery creates a new identity as mystic who is in good company – Christ, saints, martyrs, *et al.* Mysticism becomes a coping mechanism for Margery in Parker's opinion, but Margery's text moves beyond a method to cope with the hardships she faced as her

elite position in Lynn dissolved. The economic language that Margery uses in describing her visions and mystical experiences indicates the bourgeois ideology of the mercantile middle class through which she interprets the world remains alive and well. Undoubtedly Margery uses self-deprecating language at times, but it is used in such a way to draw attention to her instead of away from her. By using the generic conceits of contemplative writing and presenting herself in the text as the poor, despised creature, Margery conventionally allies herself with Christ. Her identities within Lynn become compromised due to political events, but Margery clearly does not wallow in sorrow for herself. She creates a new identity as a mystic to remove herself from her former associations and to manipulate this new role to her own ends – especially in crafting her *Book*.

Margery's transformation to a mystic and her posing as a living relic are situated in the contexts of the mercantile middle class of the Middle Ages. David Aers discusses the ways in which Margery's economic language is tied to her community and class, noting that the mercantile world “was Margery's 'natural' and unquestioned element.” (73). Sheila Delaney, too, discusses Margery's existence in a “cash nexus” (110), and Delaney continues, noting it is from this nexus (centered in Lynn) that Margery interprets the world around her. Margery is a creature of the mercantile middle class; furthermore, even though she will voice her regret over her material sins, she will not abandon the language of this materialism in her *Book*. Aers focuses mostly on Margery's acceptance of the bourgeois economic system in which she lived despite the fact that her revelations from God were at odds with the overemphasis of accumulation:

It is important that we understand how normal were the values she exhibited in these episodes, and how marginal the moralizing clerical grid she later applied. Nor are they utterly alien to our own infinitely more intensive and extensive market society where the pursuit of economic self-interest and the accumulation of commodities are perceived as the greatest human good, one which should determine collective decision and personal values. (76)

Margery determines what is good and what is right inherently through an economic lens. As a daughter of the Burgess of Lynn, John Brunham, she unquestioningly crafts her various identities through her class because the middle class forms her self. In fact, it is her position in the mercantile middle class that allows her to conceive of herself independent of the people around her. This differentiation echoed in her text is only possible in an economically-based society that juxtaposes one commodity with another to determine the value of each independent of the other. David Gary Shaw discusses such comparative relationships between people in Medieval English society and concludes they stem from “the desire to grow in status (including wealth) and to become more of an *event* in their social milieux [sic]” (198). Margery differs from the townspeople of Lynn through her family, through her profession, and, later, through her visions. Margery's society is *not* our society. It is clearly pre-capitalist, but it also clearly has a sense of market values that, as Aers points out, are “a naturalized part of [Margery's] daily experience” (77). Margery's daily experience informs her mystical experience; that is, she develops a mysticism steeped in the material market values of her world.

Margery's complex understanding of mysticism paired with her strong sense of herself as an individual within her community create a wonderfully complex context for the second frame of the *Book* – the generic frame of contemplative writing. On one hand, Margery attempts to present herself as if her life were in fact a saint's life. This desire is evident in the genre in which she chooses to write. Yet in describing the exemplarity of her actions, Margery cannot help but to channel the discourses of Christian materiality and economics that were such a large part of her life. Her understanding of exemplarity, in fact, seems to rest firmly in these discourses, and so to present herself accurately within her contemplative writing, she has no other means of doing so. Margery's second frame, then, constantly struggles with its generic expectations being at odds with the language within it. Rather than nullify her mystical authenticity, however, this tension makes Margery's version of contemplative writing more accessible to its readers.

The Prologue to Margery Kempe's *Book*

Rather than a way of authorizing her text as being in some way orthodox, Margery's use of a scribe in her prologue is rhetorical ornamentation of contemplative writing.³⁰ Margery also uses a scribe in order to overcome certain obstacles that would have been unique to women writers. As Staley notes, "Authorial efforts to control texts were even more difficult for little-known figures or for women such as Julian of Norwich

³⁰ Margery's use of a scribe may also be a way for her to deflect criticism from authorities. Richard Newhauser addresses why writers in the fifteenth century might seek anonymity:

By the early fifteenth century, moreover, there were also more urgent political reasons for remaining anonymous. Lollards (heretical followers of the Oxford theologian John Wycliffe), wished to avoid the repercussions of their beliefs, while orthodox writers whose texts might be appropriated by Lollards, wished to avoid the accusation of heretical sympathies. In these cases, remaining nameless was not only an allegiance to the ideology of humility; it was also a political expediency. (39)

In Margery's case, we see her using a scribe to accommodate the possibility of such fallout. As I have shown, she clearly controls the scribal hand at work in her *Book*, but the prologue also may alleviate the potential problems that Newhauser addresses.

and Margery Kempe” (20). But in no way is the scribe the author. Margery controls her book even if her hands are not those that physically write it down. Staley adds that Margery “deployed the scribe in ways that illuminate [her sense] of [herself] as [an author]” (20). Mary Carruthers equates the medieval scribe to the modern typist:

The ability to “write” is not always the same thing as the ability to compose and comprehend in a fully textual way, for indeed one who writes (a scribe) may simply be a skilled practitioner, employed in a capacity akin to that of a professional typist today. The distinction of composing (or “making” in the Middle English) from writing-down continued to be honored throughout the Middle Ages. (10)

In this respect, Margery remains the “maker” of her text. She places herself in this role when referring to the clerks who “bodyn hyr þat sche schuld don hem [hyr meuyngys & hyr steringys] wryten & *makyn a booke* of hyr felyngs & hir reuelacyons” (3; italics mine). If Margery were unable to write (or even discouraged from writing), these lines here would be out of place. Only after God instructs Margery to write down her experiences does Margery suddenly voice the necessity of a scribe: “Than had þe creatur no wryter þat wold fulfyllyn hyr desyr ne ȝeue credens to hir felingys” (4). The latter half of this excerpt would seem to mean, at first glance, that Margery desired someone to authorize her experiences, but the credence Margery seeks could simply refer to fulfilling her framing of her *Book* as contemplative writing. She calls attention to the necessity of presenting her work through the figure of a scribe to meet the generic expectations of her readers. Margery does not need a scribe to justify her feelings because God affirms them. When the Lord tells Margery to make her *Book*, “he comawnded hyr & chargyd hir þat

sche xuld don wryten hyr felyngys & reuelacyons & *þe forme of her leuyng þat hys goodnesse myht be knowyn to alle þe world*” (3-4; italics mine). Part of conveying the form of her living requires that Margery make clear what this form is. In this sense, then, the scribe becomes a framing accessory to crafting a piece of contemplative writing. Staley concludes, “Kempe’s deployment of the figure of the scribe links her text to the community of the faithful” (31).

Margery uses a scribe to meet the generic expectations of contemplative writing, yet she also provides an episode to make clear that she authorizes the scribe to write her *Book*. The initial scribe who Margery uses dies before he can finish the work, but then the second scribe who Margery finds cannot read the writing of the first scribe. She recalls this discovery:

Than was þer a prest which þis creatur had gret affecyon to, & so sche comownd wyth hym of þis mater & browt hym þe boke to redyn. Þe booke was so euel wretyn þat he coud lytyl skylle þeron, for it was neiþyr good Englyschne Dewch, ne þe lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as oþer letters ben. Perfor þe prest leued fully þer schuld neuyr man redyn it, but it wer special grace. Neuyr-þe-lesse, he behyte hir þat if he coud redyn it he wolde copyn it owt & wrytyn it betyr wyth good wylle. (4)

Because the first scribe’s writing and language are unintelligible to the second scribe, the second scribe has no way of writing Margery’s *Book* unless she can somehow make it legible to him. This obstacle vexes Margery, of course, who, in the interim, suffers further scorn and slander from her community. After praying to God to “purchasyn hym [the second scribe] grace to redden it & wrytyn it also” (5), the scribe miraculously

comprehends the previous scribe's writing. Margery's prayers enable him to begin the work; the authority here comes from God by way of Margery – she presents herself as an intercessor between the scribe and God.³¹ To emphasize the reliance of the scribe on her, Margery includes a second obstacle – the scribe loses his sight. Margery advises him, “do as wel as God wold ȝeue hym grace & not levyn” (5). When the scribe returns to his work after this advice, he can see “as wel, hym thowt, as euyr he dede be-for be day-lyth & be candel-lyght boȝe” (5). Margery literally and physically enables the scribe to perform his work.

Before the prologue comes to a close, it recalls the importance of memory in the creation of Margery's *Book* and frames the text as belonging to and emanating from Margery. The second scribe calls attention to the creation of the longer revised prologue “to expressyn mor openly þan doth þe next [the original prologue] folwyng, which was wretyn er þan þis” (5). The longer prologue results from Margery's ability to help the second scribe – first to read (make intelligible) the previous scribe's work and then to see in order that he read and write at all. In the shorter, second prologue, Margery summarizes the episode analyzed above: “& sythen be þe request of þis creatur & compellyng of hys owyn cosciens he asayd a-gayn for to rede it, & it was mech mor esy þan it was a-for-tyme” (6). The beginning of this line might be read to suggest that Margery makes this request again of the scribe; however, it also could imply that Margery's request was not directly to the scribe but rather first to the Lord, highlighting her connection to divine authority. In either reading, Margery represents the authoritative voice even if she does not write the book with her own hand. In the Middle Ages, of course, “the written version of a text was considered to be a scribble or secretarial

³¹ I'll return to Margery's position as an intercessor later in this chapter.

product, not an authorial one *no matter who the scribe was*” (Carruthers 196). The last lines of the second prologue further emphasize Margery’s making of her *Book*: “And so he gan to wryten in þe 3er of ovr Lord a m. cccc. xxxvj on þe day next after Mary Maudelyn after þe informacyon of þis creatur” (6). The line serves first to simply note when the composition of the work began, and such a notation is common for scribes. The repetition of the word “after,” though, in such close proximity strikes me as an emphatic moment. This preposition indicates that the work that follows is both after Margery’s telling and also at Margery’s command. The scribal hand affirms that Margery controls not only the information in the text but also the way in which the scribe presents this information to the reader. By the end of this second prologue, especially when considered in light of the end of the first prologue, we see that Margery, though she may not have written the text, clearly controls and frames the making of it.

Contemplative Writing: Economics, Christian Materiality, and Relic Discourse

Margery uses the episodic nature of contemplative writing as a second frame within her *Book*. The text presents the episodes of Margery’s life in a constant present tense, organized by memory rather than chronology of historical record. Margery frames her life and her mystical experiences using language that resonates with the Middle Class economic and late medieval cultural materialism – specifically Christian materiality and relic discourse. The constant present tense within the episodes of Margery’s *Book* recreate Margery’s life in a process of happening. “To narrate the past,” observes Jeffrey J. Cohen, “is for Kempe to live it again, ‘truly and freschly,’ corporeally” (168). Others have viewed this “presentness” of Margery’s text as a sign that it is meant to be a devotional aid to others who read it, inserting themselves into Margery’s role in a

relationship with Christ. For example, Barbara Zimbalist argues, “In decentering Margery and allowing Christ’s voice to speak as directly as Margery claimed he spoke to her, the *Book* appears in a new light: as the record of dialogue aspiring to teach the vernacular reader just as Margery herself has been taught” (17). Both of these perspectives pick up on Margery’s framing of her text as “an asynchronous *now*” (Dinshaw 107) – that is, it has its own conception of time that is neither the Middle Ages nor the present of her Middle Ages. Carolyn Dinshaw adds, “There’s something about Margery that will not be assimilated into these [temporal] paradigms; there’s something out of joint” (107). Yet Margery’s historical present – fifteenth-century Lynn – remains a major influence on how she presents the “now” of her text. In this sense, Cohen’s call to look at “what a body *does*” helps us understand how Margery’s actions at once both problematize her use of contemplative writing to frame them and yet uniquely demonstrate to her readers how she is unique amongst her peers (xxiii). In the case of Margery’s *Book*, we have the memory of both her body and how she acted in specific episodes. Such a framing depends on the “presentness” discussed above, and the cultural markers of Margery are essential in producing her identity.

Due to the influence of middle class economics on her culture, Margery presents her revelations within a system of exchange between her and the divine – usually Christ. In a similar fashion, Margery then establishes a system of exchange for her visions between her and her peers. Margery becomes an access point to heavenly visions and knowledge, and she wants compensation from those to whom she grants access – she expects tangible goods in exchange for sharing her intangible visions with the men and women she encounters. Cristina Mazzoni addresses Margery’s use of food and drink as a

type of analogical language to recast her visions in worldly experience, noting “For this woman, food and drink signal normality and, even more, divine grace” (175). Margery presents food as one of the main tangible goods of exchange that she receives (and more than likely expects) for sharing her visions with others. Food of course would have been one of the most important goods that Margery could receive while on her pilgrimages. Furthermore, Mazzoni has shown that eating food, for Margery, is a community-forming practice – one in which she may bond with fellow pilgrims and others (172). Simultaneously Margery expects others to share food with her and rewards such sharing with communicating with God on behalf of others. Margery only survives by using her revelations as commodities in an exchange system with those around her. Margery notes such payment from a priest who sought her while she was in Rome:

Than throw þe provysyon of ovr mercyful Lord Crist Jhesu þer was comyn a preste, a good man, owte of Ingland into Rome wyth oþer felawshep speryng and inqwryng diligently aftyr þe seyde creatur whom he had nevyr seyn be-forn, ne sche hym. But whil he was in Ingland he herd tellyn of swech a woman was at Rome wyth þe which he longyd to spekyn ȝyf God wolde grawntyn hym grace. Wher-for, whyl he was in hys owyn lond, he, purposyng to se þis creatur whan he thorw þe sufferawns of ovr Lord myght come þer sche was, purueyd golde to bryng hir in relevyng of hir ȝyf sche had nede. (96)

This priest has never met Margery, but he has heard about her abilities. He presents himself as a consumer, exchanging money for Margery’s revelation. The priest has no guarantee that she will or that he will be satisfied with the service she provides to him –

namely, her revelation. After Margery grants a revelation to the priest, he both pays Margery enough gold to return to England and insists that she eat her meals with him, which he also provides (96-7). Margery then writes, “And þan was fulfilled þat owr Lord seyde to hir a lityl be-forn, ‘Gold is to-þe-warde’” (97). In a previous revelation, Christ informed Margery that she would receive gold, which seems to be problematic in the circumstances of another mystic, but Margery authorizes this economic exchange as something of which Christ approves and, more importantly, encourages. Christ told her that she would receive gold, and while we could view this revelation no differently than one in which He promises her safe travel from one place to another, it is interesting that Margery’s Christ is concerned with money. The middle class, of which Margery was a part, had begun to be concerned with money by the fifteenth century, and Margery’s position within this society affects her mysticism and how she interprets her visions.

Margery is always at the center of these combined exchange relationships, transmitting her divine visions to an earthly audience. She is the middlewoman in an exchange between Christ and people on Earth regardless of the direction in which the exchange is working. A prime example in Margery’s *Book* is her meeting with the bishop of Worcester: “Than þe Bischop seyde, ‘Margery, I haue not somownd þe, for I knowe wel j-now þu art Iohn of Burnamys dowtyr of Lynne. I pray þe be not wroth, but far fayr wyth me, and I xal far fayr wyth the, for þu xalt etyn wyth me þis day’” (109). The bishop wants to meet with Margery so that she will pray for him because he believes he is dying, but Margery’s text emphasizes the hesitation in the bishop’s word. The bishop seems to be wary of summoning Margery. He recognizes Margery’s class status as John Burnham’s daughter and that she is not a servant to command. The text couches his

actions through his fear that Margery will rebuke him if he attempts to exert authority over her. Again, it is clear that Margery shapes her identity as mystic through economics. The bishop both provides Margery food and pays her gold to pray for him: “At þe last sche toke hir leue of hym, & he gaf hir golde & hys blyssyng & comawndyd hys mene to lede hir forth in hir wey” (110). The bishop is concerned with his life after death – his heavenly existence – while at the same time he recognizes Margery's need for food and money to survive on Earth. To ensure his salvation in heaven, it seems that the bishop must ensure Margery's survival on the earthly plane. Her ethereal visions are a manifestation of her earthly body; therefore, Margery's text places her at the center of this exchange. Without her body, there are no mystical revelations, there is no identity of mystic, and, most importantly, there is no text.

Margery's *Book* and the experiences she frames make clear that her body is the site of her mysticism. Though she sees her revelations in her mind or through her soul, the manifestations of these revelations come through her body, which is both beneficial and detrimental to her. The benefits have been addressed throughout this analysis – food and money in particular – but even the detriments of her body-centric mysticism are presented as an economic exchange. When the Archbishop of York questions and later absolves Margery, he *pays* someone to take her away from him:

Than a good sad man of þe Erchebischope meny askyd hys Lord what he wolde zevyn hym and he xulde ledyn hir. Þe Erchebischope proferyd hym v s. and þe man askyd a nobyl. Þe Erchebischope, answeyng, seyde, “I wil not waryn so meche on hir body.” “Ȝys, good ser,” seyde þe sayd creatur, “our

Lord schal rewardyn zow ryth wel a-zen.” Þan þe Erchebischop seyde to þe man, “Se, her is v s., & lede hir fast owt of þis cuntre.” (128)

Margery's body, at this point, becomes an object of exchange between two men, and for allowing her to go free, Margery promises the Archbishop an equal reward for his kindness, praying for him before departing. Additionally, it is never long after a rejection of her mysticism that Margery's mysticism and special position as intermediary between humans and Christ is framed with a reward to reassert her validity. Directly after leaving York and arriving in Bridlington to meet with her confessor, Margery receives payment to pray for her confessor. She recounts, “Þan þe good man gaf hir sylver, besechyng hir to prey for hym” (129). Margery's text frames her mysticism as both alienating and welcoming: it leads some people to reject her while at the same time bringing her into contact with others who are willing to take part in the economic exchange that she embodies.

Margery often positions herself through her identity of mystic at the center of an exchange. The concern of money and economy constantly lingers in Margery's narrative regardless of the form of exchange that it takes. After falling into a sickness nearly leading to her death, Margery frets over her debt - “sche was powr & had no mony, & also sche was in gret dette” (105) – and is subject to much verbal abuse and harassment from the townspeople. Again, within the system of exchange that her mysticism embraces, Margery's text frames Christ's love and aid as a product of being despised by those around her. Directly following the description of the townspeople's despicable language and acts toward her, Margery exclaims her trust in God: “Owr Lord God schal helpyn ryth wel, for he fayld me nevyr in no cuntre, & þerfor I trust hym rith wel” (106).

Margery's trust is then rewarded: “& sodenly cam a good man and gaf hir fowrty pens” (106). Margery's text places her at the center of this exchange; she is always the focus whether she receives payment for her revelations or aid from her prayers. In other words, Margery benefits regardless of the direction of action in her narrative – the prologue's framing of the text via memory ensures this result. If Margery channels her revelations for a person, she receives money from that person, or if she prays to Christ for aid, He inevitably grants her this aid whether through Himself or through a human being.

Margery depicts Christ's desire for her in her *Book* to the point of excess. Like so much of the text, this language heavily utilizes images of exchange. Margery often describes Christ telling her how good she is and how much she shall be rewarded in heaven for her suffering on Earth, but it is the suffering especially that Christ desires:

Owr Lord seyð a-zen to hir, “Nay, nay dowtyr, for þat þyng that I lofe best
þei lofe not, & þat is schamys, despitys, scornys, & reprevys of þe pepil,
& þerfor xal þei not haue þis grace. For, dowtyr, I telle þe, he þat dredith
þe schamys of þe world may not parfytely louyn God. And, dowtyr, vndyr
þe abyte of holynes is suryd meche wykkydnes. Dowtyr, 3yf þu sey þe
wikkydnes þat is wrowt in þe werld as I do, þu schuldist have gret wondyr
þat I take not vttyr veniawns on hem. But, dowtyr, I spar for thy lofe. Þu
wepist so euery day for mercy þat I must nedys grawnt it þe, & wil not þe
pepil beleuyn þe goodnes þat I werke in þe for hem. Neuyr-þe-lesse,
dowtyr, þer schal come a tyme when þei xal be ryth fayn to beleuyn þe
grace þat I have 3ovyn þe for hem. And I schal sey to hem whan þei arn
passyd owt of þis world, 'Lo, I ordeynd hir to wepyn for hir synnes, and 3e

had hir in gret despite, but hir charite wolde neuyr sesen for 3ow.' And
þerfor, dowtyr, þei þat arn good sowlis xal hyly thank me for þe grace &
goodnes þat I haue 3ove þe, & þei þat arn wikkyd xal grutchyn & han gret
peyn to suffyr þe grace þat I schewe to þe. And þerfor I xal chastisyn hem
as it wer for my-self.” (158-9)

Margery presents her conversations with Christ in such a way to emphasize that Christ desires her love, often manifested through her tears, more so than just the suffering and reproof that Margery faces. Moreover, He claims that he spares the world around Margery because of His love for her. Margery’s actions, in this case, are a type of salvific grace for everyone around her. Because Margery embraces and accepts her suffering, Christ loves and desires her all the more, and He promises her that he will chastise those poeple who detract from her. Everything in the above passage revolves around Margery: *her* suffering, *her* love, *her* grace, etc. Christ gives Margery tears and penance to save the souls of others around her; in other words, the encounters and experiences of others with Margery’s weeping, praying, and general presence are a part of the exchange between Margery and Christ. Their salvation and the grace that Christ will show them results *from* Margery's suffering; Margery the Mystic is, more or less, a gift to the people around her from Christ. If they accept and embrace Margery as this commodity of salvation, they will find Christ welcoming them in Heaven, but if they reject and ostracize her (as so many do), they will find Christ's vengeance awaiting them.

Margery’s privileged position in this exchange relationship results from the ways in which she perceives her visions and herself as the transmitter of these visions. Margery’s perception manifests explicitly in the way that her text presents her as a living

relic, which results from the unique combination of middle class economics (as demonstrated above), Christian materiality, and relic discourse (specifically in its relation to the previous two categories). Gail McMurray Gibson observes this combination of factors, too, noting,

One of the important social facts often overlooked about fifteenth-century religious culture is that those same buying of indulgences and establishing of perpetual chantries whose abuses were to change the shape of Christendom also served to foster intense religious individualism. That is, such customs were ways for lay persons, at least lay persons of means, to take an active role in the mysteries of religion and of the soul's salvation.

(6)

The market for these goods – clearly operating within Christian materiality – allowed laypeople to participate in exchange relationships that traded material goods for spiritual gain. Margery takes this exchange relationship to the next level, making herself the object of exchange, and her text uses contemplative writing to constantly present these exchanges as a way of authorizing her actions. Margery initially presents herself in her *Book* as a member of the upper-Middle Class of Lynn, and by establishing her place in the community before going on to alter her identity, Margery provides her reader with underlying cultural and class signifiers that pervade the text and will come to influence the way in which the text describes its episodic memories. After Christ cures Margery's sickness, she returns to her worldly ways, wearing "pompows aray" to indicate her class status, and she admits, "Sche had ful greet envye at hir neybowrs þat þei schuld ben arayd so wel as sche. Alle hir desyr was for to be worshepd of þe pepul. Sche wold not be war

be onys chastysyng ne be content wyth þe goodys þat God had sent hire, as hir husband was, but euyr desyryd mor & mor” (9). This moment clearly works to provide a figure against which Margery can contrast her changed self, but it also shows us how Margery understands a few key elements of performance that she will address throughout her text: dress, reception, and desire. These three elements of performance preoccupy Margery’s presentation of herself in the text as a living relic within an elaborate exchange relationship between Christ and humans. In every episode, the text describes Margery’s actions within these categories in order to direct the reader’s attention to them; in other words, these categories direct the reader to interpret and to understand Margery’s actions through the text in such a way to reflect beneficially upon her. Margery constructs herself and her actions within her *Book* objects of devotion.³² Through examining these categories in light of the cultural contexts already discussed, Margery’s presentation of herself, like a relic, points back to the material nature of the text that encloses it.

After hearing a heavenly melody while lying in bed with her husband, Margery is apparently transformed from her previous ways. To recognize this transformation, Margery requires an audience to respond to her change in order for it to demonstrate difference. Margery supplies that audience when she discusses this change in her actions:

For, wher sche was in ony cumpanye, sche wold sey oftyn-tyme, “It is ful mery in Hevyn.” & þei þat knew hir gouernawnce be-for-tyme & now herd hir spekyn so mech of þe blysse of Heuyn seyde vn-to hir, “Why speke ȝe so of þe myrth þat is in Heuyn; ȝe know it not & ȝe haue not be

³² Malo discusses the ways in which Pandarus and Troilus construct Criseyde as an object of devotion. I’m likening this process to what happens in Margery’s *Book*, but of course Margery is the one constructing, too (157).

þer no mor þan we,” and wer wroth wyth hir for sche wold not her no
speke of worldly thyngys as þei dedyn & as sche dede be-forn-tyme. (11)

Margery’s perspective is the only one available in her text, and so she must present such dialogue in order to highlight such dissonance in her audience’s (her fellow community members’) understanding of her. Margery must relate this cool reception of those around her so that readers will ally themselves with the interiorly-changed Margery, but it is evident despite Margery’s insistence on her change that the members of Margery’s community had previous expectations and cannot quickly adapt their understanding of Margery to fit her new persona. In other words, through recreating her identity, Margery ostensibly creates a new reality that is available to its reader but not available to the audience within the text. Margery privileges the perspective from this memory so that the reader has an advantage over those remembered by the text: the reader knows Margery has undergone a significant internal change whereas the townspeople of Lynn do not.

The reader’s knowledge in contrast to the ignorance of the people described and recalled in the *Book* creates a divide between the audience *in* the text and the audience *of* the text. The remembered performance constantly displays the doubts and misgivings of the internal audience, but Margery recalls her actions in the text in specific a specific order to assure her reader before doubts and misgivings arise. The *Book* often includes phrases such as, “as schal be wretyn aftyr be þe leue of Ihesu” (12). In some ways such posturing is a conceit of contemplative writing, but it also acts as if it were an aside in the text, informing its reader that what seems to be an impossible act will actually come to fruition. Margery strategically orders her text to convince her reader of its accuracy. For example, Margery describes her plenteous tears to display contrition for her past

misdeeds, but they elicit only doubt and contempt from those who witness them in the text. She writes, “Hir wepyng was so plentyows and so contwynyng þat mech pepul wend þat sche might wepyn & leuyn whan sche wold, and þerfor many man seyde sche was a fals ypocryte & wept for þe world for socowr & for worldly good” (13). The audience within the text has no way of knowing that Margery has changed; thus, they read her current actions against the Margery they know. They assume that she acts so because she no longer has the material goods and wealth that she once had. The order of the text, however, has led the reader to believe that Margery has changed, making these actions seem legitimate. The text frames the memory, then, so that the reader may not doubt Margery’s claims. She concludes Chapter 3, noting, “And þan ful many forsokyn hir þat louyd hir be-for whyl sche was in þe world & wold not knowyn hir, & euyr sche thankyd God of alle, no-thing desyryng but mercy and forȝefnes of synne” (13). Because her community no longer “knows” her, Margery demonstrates that she has fundamentally changed.

Margery’s *Book* attempts to lead its reader to a conclusion that benefits Margery, but we must remember that the way in which Margery fashions her text responds to the contemplative process that she desires it to perform. Margery’s concern for how her audience receives her *Book* comes into play here, too. In Chapter 5, Margery recalls Christ reassuring her and, essentially, shielding her against the criticism of those around her: “Drede þe nowt, dowtyr, for þow schalt haue þe vycory of al þin enmys. I schal ȝeue þe grace j-now to answer euery clerke in þe loue of God” (17). Christ first explains to Margery that she will conquer her enemies, which seems to refer to her detractors. By situating detractors as enemies, the text effectively voids the criticism that Margery faces

from those who do not believe her. To further emphasize this point, Christ assures Margery that he will give her grace in order to answer clerical authorities that question her actions and words. In this turn, Margery remembers Christ authorizing her actions and describes any criticism that others levy against her as a necessary worldly suffering in her Christ-like role. The text continuously validates Margery either to anticipate criticism or to respond to it. Christ continues in this episode, “And, dowtyr, I wil þow leue þi byddyng of many bedys and think swych thowtys as I wyl putt in þi mend. I schal zeuyn þe leue to byddyn tyl sex of þe cloke to sey what þow wyld. þan schalt þow ly style & speke to me be thowt, & I schal ze fe to þe hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon” (17). Here, Margery presents her continued contemplation as a command from Christ: she appropriates Christ’s voice to justify her actions so that the reader will believe Margery’s actions mirror this command/intent.

We may better understand Margery’s presentation of herself and her actions if we consider her as a living relic and analyze the episodes of her text from this perspective. By placing Christ’s validation of her within the text discussed above, the reader understands the subsequent episodes differently than the audience of the actions within the text. Those within the text see Margery as a manipulator seeking attention, but these actions performed through the text’s frame justify such actions. The mandate to “think the thoughts that Christ puts in her mind” is a slippery context for the reader of the text because it is impossible to know whether Margery imagines or receives a given vision. When the text recalls Margery’s vision in which she is the handmaiden to Mary after her birth, we see Margery in a service position: “& anon ower Lady was born, & þan sche beysde hir to take þe chyld to hir & kepe it tyl it wer twelve 3er of age wyth good mete &

drynke, wyth fayr whyte clothys & whyte kerchys. And þan sche seyde to þe blyssed chyld, ‘Lady, 3e schal be þe Modyr of God’” (18). Margery recalls serving Mary as a child and also revealing to her that she will be the mother of God in order to procure grace for herself. On one hand, Margery inserts herself into the history of the New Testament, making her the harbinger of good news that the Archangel Gabriel delivers much later (in Biblical history).³³ More importantly, though, Margery describes this moment in the text as an exchange in which she provides care and information to Mary in order that she (Margery) will later receive equal care: “I pray 3ow, Lady, 3yf þat grace falle 3ow, forsake not my seruyse” (18). Repayment is only logical for Margery, considering her economic setting. The text provides no audience to respond to this request, but it necessarily relates this entire episode to build a certain conception of Margery.

Margery strives to connect the contemplative processes of her visions with material results, too, in order to make clear the connection that she has with Christ. A stone and piece of wood hit Margery in church one day as she prays:

It be-fel on a Fryday be-for Whytson Evyn, as þis creatur was in a cherch
of Seynt Margarete at N. heryng hir Messe, sche herd a gret noyse & a
dredful. Sche was sore a-stoynd, sor dredyng þe voys of þe pepyl, which
seyd God schuld take veniawns vp-on hir. Sche knelyd up-on hir knees,

³³ Gibson notes, “It is often when Margery Kempe sounds most like her inimitable self that she is, in fact, most the Pseudo-Bonaventure. When, for example, Margery is present in the meditational vision when the resurrected Christ appears to his mother, Margery’s report of the spiritual dialogue between Mother and son . . . all has the ring of Margery Kempe’s own and unique imagination. But in fact, the whole scene and suggestions for mentally producing it existed in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, in the authority of a revered text and not in Margery’s own psychology (49). However, Margery uses her presence in these moments in order to establish herself within the economic exchanges she creates and to authorize herself as a living relic.

heldyng down hir hed and hir boke in hir hand, prayng owyr Lord Crist
Ihesu for grace and for mercy. Sodeynly fel down fro þe heyest party of þe
cherch-vowte fro vndyr þe fote of þe sparre on hir hed & on hir bakke a
ston which weyd iij pownd & a schort ende of a tre weyng vj pownd þat
hir thowt hir bakke brake a-sundyr, and sche ferd as sche had be deed a
lytyl whyle. Soone after sche cryed “Ihesu mercy,” & a-noon hir peyn was
gon. (21-22)

The text relates this event in a specific order for the reader – Margery crucially fears for her safety from those around her *before* the stone and wood fall from the ceiling. This order of events makes it seem as if the people cause the objects to fall, injuring Margery. At the same time, too, Margery prays and then audibly cries out for mercy after she has been struck, and through ordering these actions thus, the text makes clear an exchange relationship. Margery receives mercy because she was praying for it before and asks for it after this event. Margery immediately recalls a vision in which “þe spirit of God seyde to hir sowle, ‘Helde þis for a gret myracle, & 3yf þe pepyl wyl not leuyn þis, I schal werkyn meche mor’” (22). Margery describes some people – Master Allen, a white friar, in particular – who believe it as a miracle, but then others “leuyd it was a tokyn of wreth & veniawns” (22). Margery uses this episode thus to convince her reader of the miracle, but she also requires the doubtful audience so that God must perform more miracles through her. Because not everyone hails this event as a miracle, Margery will work more miracles to convince them. This move clearly demonstrates the necessity of the materiality of Margery’s experience – seeing in this case is believing.

Margery continues to remember episodes in which she fulfills intercessory roles through which her actions will provide grace. In this way, the text frames Margery's mystical experiences almost as if they are a profession by which Margery may profit.³⁴ In an episode with a monk who seeks Margery's counsel, the monk repays her with dinner: "The monke toke hir be þe hand & led hir in-to a fayr hows of office, made hir a gret dyner, & sythen gaf hyr gold to prey for hym" (27). Margery, then, emphasizes the successful results of the monk who engages her in this exchange relationship. Margery then notes that later the monk "was turnyd fro hys synne, & was mad suppriowr of þe place" and "hyly blyssed God þat euyr he saw hir" (27). The monk pays Margery initially to pray for him, but Margery remembers this episode in her text in this order to reassert the value of her prayers and support by recalling the fortune that the monk later received that he attributes to his interactions with Margery. In this episode, Margery demonstrates both an exchange relationship and, through this relationship, she poses herself as a type of relic. In other episodes, Margery enters into similar economic exchanges including her encounter with the Bishop of Lincoln in which he provides her with money "to prey for hym" (36). Margery highlights these moments of exchange in her *Book* to demonstrate her value, and she voices no hesitation that might suggest she engages in a scam such as Chaucer's Pardoner. Margery's text makes it clear that her visions are authentic and that it is acceptable, within this paradigm, that she receives money for her services.

Margery situates her text within such an economic context as part of her understanding of her material culture, pointing to the importance of material signifiers in her mystical encounters. Margery depends on material signifiers in her text to present herself as a mystic, and she draws her readers' attention to these signifiers in her text.

³⁴ See Chapter 10 in particular.

Margery's text uses elements of Christian materiality and relic discourse in the ways in which it describes her interactions with others. It creates a reality in which Margery is constantly witnessing her mysticism and must make it clear through material signs, documented and recalled with each reading. One of these signs to which the text turns time and again is Margery's tears, as the text relays through Christ's voice:

knowyn wele þow mayst not han terys ne swych dalyawns but whan God
wyl send hem þe, for it arn þe fre zyftys of God wyth-owtyn þi meryte &
he may zeue hem whom he wyl & don þe no wrong. And þerfor take hem
mekely & þankyngly whan I wyl send hem, & suffyr pacyently whan I
wythdrawe hem, & seke besyly tyl þow mayst getyn hem, for terys of
compunccyon, deuoycon, & compassyon arn þe heyest & sekerest zyftys
þat I zeue in erde. (30-31)

Margery claims that Christ controls when tears come to her. They are material signifiers of God's grace, marking the moments when God inspires her with visions. Tears, then, are the material manifestation of the divine throughout the text. Because the text makes this relationship clear here, the reader acknowledges Margery's tears as Christ's presence. These tears, then, serve to authorize Margery; they serve to convey holiness upon her, supporting her presentation of herself as a living relic. This moment continually serves within the text as a means of eliding Margery's copious tears and bodily affects with Christ's presence.

Margery presents her tears in her *Book* through relic discourse, encouraging her readers to associate Christ's presence with her tears. Margery cries quite often throughout her text, and this abundance seems to cause readers to doubt her – understanding this as

an affective move that channels physical suffering to encounter the divine. Karma Lochrie argues convincingly that Margery's tears actually demonstrate how she is not a relic:

Imitatio Christi and abjection join in their effects, that is, the signs of transgression. Blood, odors, wounds, tears, and other kinds of bodily effluvia are not only tokens of a body "filled full of recollection and feeling of his Blessed Passion," in Julian of Norwich's words. They are also tokens of that imaginary zone which the mystic recalls, of the crossing of boundaries which separate the pure and whole body from its effects. Unlike relics, which derive power from detached bodily parts, these tokens of mystical imitation are powerful in their *relationship* to the body. They remind us that the body is not an integrated whole, that it may not be separated from its effects, that it is not charmed by the relics which achieve their power through their very detachment. They are signs of mystical desire in action, of the excess which produces them, rather than tokens of uncorrupt bodies capable of conferring power on those communities who hold them sacred.

Lochrie's point about detachment is especially accurate in the historical discourse surrounding relics, but Margery's presentation of herself within her text troubles this dichotomy that Lochrie identifies. Margery may not, in fact, be a relic, but she presents herself in her text very much like one. Margery's tears are separate from her. Margery makes it abundantly clear that Christ controls when she cries in every episode because it is Christ, after all, that brings these thoughts into Margery's mind. Furthermore, Margery's

tears continually function as objects of Christ's desire. Margery argues that it only makes sense that she would cry when she sees people suffering because it reminds her of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which she relates to compassion for a friend's suffering:

How meche mor myth þei wepyn, cryen, & roryn ȝyf her most belouyd
frendys wer wyth vyolens takyn in her sygth & wyth al maner of reпре
browt be-for þe juge, wrongfully condemnyd to þe deth, & namely so
spyteful a deth as owr mercyful Lord suffyrd for owyr sake. How schuld
þei suffyr yt? No dowt but þei xulde boþe cry & rore & wrekyng hem ȝyf
þei myth, & ellys men wold sey þei wer no frendys. (70-71)

In other words, Margery justifies her crying through claiming that she exists within a different temporal paradigm than her detractor. Dinshaw addresses this problem of time for Margery: "[Margery's] crying absorbs the temporalities of past, present, and future into a panoramic *now* where God and all his creatures can, and should, live" (114).

Margery models her outbursts of tears as something one should be expected to do when she thinks of Christ's death upon the cross because it is happening all of the time.

Additionally, Margery's focus on Christ's suffering is typical for female mystics. Lochrie discusses how Margery's tears, like her clothing, signifies her authorization by Christ:

"Through her tears, then, Kempe makes a spectacle of her reading of the body of Christ, a reading which she herself embodies and translates into *The Book of Margery Kempe*. It is ultimately Christ's body which authorizes and embodies her own speech" (8). Margery uses tears within her text as physical signs that Christ visits her; she both proclaims and acts the mystical experience to those around her so that they, too, may think on Christ's Passion. Lochrie agrees, writing, "Kempe's tears become a public spectacle by which

others may be reminded of Christ's Passion and their own sins" (196). Margery's framing of her *Book*, however, goes beyond reminding her readers of Christ's Passion – it enacts her bodily experiencing of its constant presence/presentness.

Margery continues her outbursts of tears both on pilgrimages and in churches. Such outbursts are generally viewed with annoyance by those who surround her, but in spite of this response from others, her tears continue until Christ no longer wills her to experience them. Margery's outbursts themselves are spectacles, as Lochrie notes above, that draw others' attention to her, and it is through this remembered attention that Margery defines her tears as relics that signify her connection to Christ and that she poses herself as a living relic. In Bristol while waiting for a ship, Margery weeps and wails thinking about Christ, which leads those around her to scorn and to despise her, and she responds by seeking forgiveness from Christ on their behalf: "Lord, as þy seydyst hangyng on þe Cros for þi crucyfyerys, "Fadyr, forzeue hem; þei wite not what þei don," so I beseche þe, fozeue þe pepyl al scorne & slawndrys & al þat þei han trespassyd, 3yf it be they wille, for I haue deseruyd meche mor & meche more am I worthy" (107).

Margery recalls a conversation with Christ after she has cried; her speech seems to be authorized through her tears. After she cries, Margery in her text explains *how* her tears should be read by those around her when she expresses her intimate relationship with Christ. Margery fashions her body in a position of reception similar to that of Christ crucified to represent this relationship. That is, Margery receives the scorn of those around her, in essence, to remind the very people who scorn her of those who scorned Christ; as Christ granted his detractors forgiveness, she grants hers Christ's forgiveness.

Margery remembers her body in her *Book* as a conduit of mysticism – her body is a vessel through which Christ communicates with people on earth. Such a relationship indicates that Margery views herself as a relic. However, unlike the relics and holy objects that so many Christians read for meaning in her culture, Margery insists that Christ has contacted her body. Thus, it is clear to the reader that her body is holy – is of the same category of these holy objects. Bynum discusses the materiality of holy objects during the later Middle Ages:

But the stuff of which medieval images were made was not incidental to their form or simply functional, nor indeed was it only an iconography to be decoded. The viewer cannot avoid observing the particular materials employed, and these materials have multiple meanings, again both obvious and subtle. Some are, as current slang puts it, “in your face”: others need to be decoded. For example, the crystal on a reliquary was a window to look through, but it mattered that the window was crystal; it encased the bone within in the nondecayable quintessence of heaven. Thereby it not only made a statement about the status of its contents as already glorified, it also raised them to glory. Moreover, late medieval devotional images call attention to themselves not just as materials but also also as specific physical objects. (*Christian Materiality* 28)

If the materiality of things, as Bynum posits, assists in raising them to glory, it makes sense that Margery would embrace the materiality of things around her and preserve them in her *Book*. Moreover, Margery's allying of the body (flesh) with Christ fits the Christian tradition perfectly. In other words, if God became man to die to save humankind from

sin, it stands to reason that the human body is the most perfect object through which Christ would be found.³⁵ Margery's text clearly recreates her world – a world of material things – in the manner that Bynum gestures toward. Margery's clothing and tears participate in the materiality of the world – a materiality that ironically is the only means possible for mysticism to express itself in the mystic herself and, especially, from her outward to others.

Margery's body is the vehicle for mystic expression in her *Book*. Bynum notes, "materials that had been touched to holy objects were thought to have become that with which they had made contact" (*Christian Materiality* 126). Margery demonstrates in her *Book* that her body has been touched, spiritually if not physically, by Christ through her visions, which leads her to believe that her body is a site of holiness. Her body is a type of "contact relic" within her *Book* as a result (Bynum *Christian Materiality* 136). Bynum discusses this category in specific relation to Christ and Mary: "The faithful also revered contact relics of Christ and Mary (for example, pieces of Mary's mantle or straw from the manger at Bethlehem) and effluvial (that is, exuded) relics (such as Mary's milk). Indeed, associated relics were particularly important in the case of Jesus and Mary, because *their actual bodies were assumed to be unavailable*, having been taken up into heaven" (*Christian Materiality* 137; my italics). Margery associates her body with Christ. She uses material signifiers to display Christ's contact with it in a similar manner. Since Christ's body is not available to be seen by people, Margery's text poses her body as a site in which Christ's body may be read.

Margery's contact with Christ has been indicated through her visions and Christ's words to her, but there are two noteworthy examples in which Margery's contact with

³⁵ This is especially true in the tradition of affective/ecstatic contemplative practices.

Christ allows us to consider her as a type of relic: Christ's ravishing of her spirit and her marriage to Christ. Early in Margery's *Book*, Christ ravishes her while she is praying:

Than on a Fryday befor Crystmes Day, as þis creatur, knelyng in a chapel
of Seynt Iohn wythinne a cherch of Seynt Margrete in N., wept wondir
sore, askyng mercy & forȝfnes of hir synnes & hir trespass, owyr mercyful
Lord Cryst Ihesu, blyssyd mot he be, rauysched hir spyryt & seyde on-to
hir: “Dowtyr, why wepyst þow so sor? I am comyn to þe, Ihesu Cryst, þat
deyd on þe Crosse sufferyng byttyr peynes & passyons for þe.” (16)

The word ravish here may mean “To drag off or to carry away (a woman) by force or with violence,” but the word also carries the connotation of rape – “To rape, violate (a woman)” (“ravish, v.”). Christ likely is not physically raping Margery, but the imagery of ravishment – spiritual sexual union – was not uncommon for mystics. This bodily imagery in Margery's text suggests spiritual contact with Christ in physical terms; in other words, Margery's body and Christ's body are joined for that moment of spiritual ecstasy. This joining of bodies is further elucidated when God weds Margery:

“Dowtyr, I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my
preuyteys & my cownselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn
ende.” . . . And þan the Fadyr toke hir be þe hand in hir sowle be-for þe
Sone & þe Holy Gost & þe Modyr of Ihesu and alle þe xij apostelys &
Seynt Kateryn & Seynt Margarete & many oþer seyntys & holy virgynes
wyth gret multitude of awngelys, seying to hir sowle, “I take þe, Margery,
for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so þat
þu be buxom & bonyr to do what I byd þe do. For, dowtyr, þer was neuyr

childe so buxom to þe modyr as I xal be to þe boþe in wel & in wo, - to
help þe and comfort þe. And þerto I make þe suyrte.” (86-7)

Again, it is clear that this is not a physical, earthly marriage, but the way in which Margery describes it to her reader is in the physical description of a real marriage. God not only contacts Margery, he binds himself to her in a spiritual marriage. What is more, Margery's marriage to God is a heavenly spectacle – notice all of the holy personages in attendance to bear witness. As we read this episode we, too, bear witness to it as it reoccurs in our minds. Margery's body participates in this spiritual spectacle; moreover, her text recalls earthly spectacles to express this union she has achieved with both Christ and God. Margery's body in her *Book*, then, functions much in the same way that the holy objects she encounters throughout her pilgrimages do. She positions herself in her text so that her body makes present Christ's absent body through this union. Margery's tears and clothing are large parts in the spectacle that she creates of her body, but she positions her body within her text, fashioning it as a conduit of mysticism – as a conduit to Christ.

To make her body a conduit, Margery's *Book* situates her body as if it were a contact relic. She presents her body thus because of the influence of her experiences before mysticism (discussed earlier); she is accustomed to being at the center of people's attention. Margery's presentation of her body is crucial. Because she is a female body, she occupies a unique context in this regard. Bynum notes, “women's lives . . . seem to be characterized by earlier vocations – by continuity rather than change – because . . . men and women tended to tell stories, to use symbols, and to understand inner development according to different models. . . . Women more often used their ordinary

experiences . . . as symbols into which they poured ever deeper and more paradoxical meanings” (25). Margery's describes her experiences in her *Book* to constantly draw attention to her body in the same way that she received attention from her social standing as a businesswoman and politician's daughter in Lynn. Margery, like a relic, effuses a presence that insists on recognition. When Margery encounters a relic on pilgrimage, she seemingly vies for its readers' attention:

& sche abood not long þer [Bristol] but went forth to þe Blod of Hayles, &
þer was schrevyn & had lowde cryes & boystows wepyngys. & þan þe
religiows men had hir in a-mongse hem & mad hir good cher, saf þei
sworyn many gret othys & horryble. & sche vndyrname hem þerof aftyr
þe Gospel, & þerof had þei gret wondyr. Neuyr-þe-lesse summe wer ryth
wel plesyd, thankyd be God of hys goodnesse. (110-1)

Notice that the Blood of Hailes causes Margery to burst into a fit of weeping, which removes others' attention from the relic itself and places their attention upon Margery's body. In a similar fashion, her text achieves the same effect in its recalling of this event. Margery models an affective response here – she is so spiritually moved that she manifests this affect in her physical fashioning of her body to those around her. Her text preserves this response, too, modeling the response for its reader. Some people who encounter her body react negatively, but others “had great wonder” at it. The latter group may read Margery's body as a devotional aid of sorts in this moment instead of the relic. Margery, though, in modeling such an affective response becomes a spectacle, much like a relic, for others to witness.

Margery's portrays her actions in the manner of Christ – to reveal Christ's authorization of her actions – later in her *Book* when she kisses lepers and when she performs a “miracle” by bringing a mad woman back to sanity. After a vision of Christ, Margery seeks permission from her confessor to kiss lepers as Christ did, and her confessor allows that she kiss female lepers. Margery comforts a particular leper: “Þe sayd creatur went to hir many tymys to comfortyn hir & preyd for hir, also ful specially þat God xulde strength hir a-geyn hir enmye, & it is to beleuyn þat he dede so, blissyd mot he ben” (177). By kissing and comforting this female leper, Margery brings her God's comfort. Her bodily presence symbolizes the presence of God – acts as a spiritual conduit for his grace to this forlorn woman. Similarly, when a man “schewyng tokenys of gret heuynes” enters the church to pray, Margery approaches him to discover what ails him. His wife, after giving birth, is “owt hir mende,” and he agrees to bring Margery to her. Again, the text frames Margery's body as a holy object – as a live intercessor to God on the behalf of others:

And þe sayd creatur preyid for þis woman euery day þat Gold xulde, 3yf it were hys wille, restoryn hir to hir wittys a-geyn. And owr Lord answeyrd in hir sowle & seyde, “Sche xulde faryn ryth wel.” Þan was sche mor bolde to preyin for hir recuryng þan sche was be-forn, & iche day, wepyng & sorwyng, preyid for hir recur tyl God 3af hir hir witte & hir mende a-zen. .

. . It was, as hem thowt þat knewyn it, a ryth gret myrakyl. . . . (178)

The text makes it clear that God is working through Margery's body in this passage so that the reader acknowledges Margery's relic status. He assures her that the mad woman will be well. The people around her think that Margery has worked a miracle through

God. Her readers conclude similarly. Both of these accounts recall Christ's own miraculous workings throughout the New Testament, but Margery's text frames Margery as the agent for these workings. Without her, God would not come into physical contact with these affected women. Sarah Beckwith has discussed Margery's allying of her body with Christ's suffering (208), but the text shows Margery's body functioning, again, as a conduit of Christ. Margery's *Book* remembers her holy body's contact with God that brings Him to earth, and the text's insistence in his preservation of her body is where we best see Margery's holy body granted a relic-like status.

Throughout Margery's *Book*, we see her body threatened by both pilgrims, sickness, and nature, but these threats are almost always assuaged by Christ's reassurances that she shall be well. Over and over again, Margery's text recounts episodes in which she is abandoned by others on a pilgrimage with her, and yet God always ensures that she does not perish. A particular instance of this preservation occurs when Margery does not take the same ship that her fellowship boards and waits to take a smaller vessel later. While she waits, Margery fears for her life during a thunderstorm, upon which Christ visits her in a vision: "Þan owr Lord Ihesu Crist seyde to hir, 'Why art thou a-ferd whil I am wyth þe? I am as mythy to kepyn þe her in þe felde as in þe strengest chirche in alle þis worlde.' & aftyr þat tyme sche was not so gretly a-ferd as sche was be-forn, for euyr sche had gret trust in hys mercy, blyssed mote he be þat comfortyd hir in euery sorwe" (101). Instead of becoming uncorruptible in death (as a relic), Margery's body is uncorruptible in life as long as Christ desires in the text. We see Margery's faith in Christ's protection of her when the smaller vessel she boards the next day is at sea during a storm:

And, whan þeir wer in þe lityl schip, it be-gan to waxin gret tempestys & dyrke wedyr. Þan þei cryed to God for grace & mercy, & a-non þe tempestys sesyd, & þei had fayr wedyr & seyled al þe nygth on ende & þe next day tyl evyn-song-tyme, & þan þei cam to londe. &, whan þei wer on þe londe, þe forseyd creatur fel downe on hir knes kyssyng þe grownde, hyly thankyng God þat had browt hem hom in safte. (102)

Margery's body is preserved on her voyage despite the storms that the ship encounters. Margery's body as a conduit bears Christ's healing and teachings to others, but it is also preserved through the same connection to Christ.

Conclusion: Contemplating the Economic, Religious, and Material

In the same way, Margery's *Book* preserves her life. The framing devices that Margery uses in her text itself recreates her life for her readers to access both her experiences of the divine and her material culture that informs such experiences. The reader experiences what Margery experienced, but he specifically experiences it according to Margery's wants and desires as the *Book*'s author. The prologue's emphasis on the importance of Margery's memory first frames the order of her text, and then the framing via contemplative writing controls the actions of Margery's text. Interestingly, the second frame often struggles with Margery's clear agency in her actions, but this does not undo her text. Rather, as with other texts that use framing devices in Middle English literature, Margery's framing devices create a greater potential for interpretation. Instead of writing a simple *vita* or treatise, Margery presents her readers with a piece of contemplative writing that marks its mystical nature through the economic, religious, and material discourses of fifteenth-century England. She seeks to elicit the best possible

affective response to her work, and she does so by posing herself to be read out of such a complicated context. In the end, readers find more than a mystic's contemplative writing about experiences with God. They find something much greater – a text that presents the uncorrupted life of a real woman who lived in a culture in which materiality and spirituality were often much more similar than different – in which materiality and spirituality worked hand-in-hand rather than against each other. The frames that Margery Kempe uses in her *Book* allow us to experience this unique woman and the culture in which she lived. As we experience it, we are meant to question it, and in such questioning, perhaps we come to some semblance of the divine that Margery so zealously craved.

Chapter Three. Defining English: Narratorial Framing in *Bevis of Hamtoun*

The Middle English poem *Beves of Hamtoun* follows its eponymous hero from his birth in England, to his exile in the East, to his triumphant return to England, and, finally, to his death abroad again in the East. Despite what may seem like a relatively simple romance trajectory, the narrative itself is anything but simple. The narrative frames Beves as a hero of English extraction – Hamtoun, precisely – yet Beves’s actions belie such an interpretation. As this lengthy narrative³⁶ progresses, however, fissures develop in the facade of Englishness. As the title of the poem and as the narrative habitually calls him, Beves is Beves *of* Hamtoun, which is to say of England, and yet this identification is not so simple. As Susan Crane rightly notes, Beves is a hero of the baronial lords of the different regions *within* England (*Insular Romance* 9). The signifier “of Hamtoun” indicates from where Beves hails and for whom Beves supposedly fights, but I believe it also emphasizes how far away from home our hero is in many episodes. Additionally, the narrative subtly draws the reader's attention to Beves's reliance on and at times alliance with groups outside of England - specifically Saracens. Despite the fact that the narrative insists Beves is of Hamtoun and that this regional affiliation may be interpreted to establish Beves as an English knight, its attention to his relationships with these outside groups causes the reader to question both his affiliation with Hamtoun and with England. The poem seems to present Beves and his actions constantly through a lens of heroism that reflects back on Hamtoun and England, yet when we consider Beves’s actions outside of this framing technique, a more nuanced interpretation develops in which Englishness is mutable rather than static. The mutability of Englishness in Middle

³⁶The poem is over 4,600 lines long.

English romance has long been noted.³⁷ I will argue the gap between the narrator's explicit framing of Beves as Beves of Hamtoun and the subsequent description of his actions within the poem creates this mutability. *Beves of Hamtoun*, then, presents its reader with a narrative about a knight that both represents and troubles identity strictly through birth and place.

The framing in *The Romaunce of Sir Beves of Hamtoun* is a narratorial frame. The narrator of the poem uses language that creates provincial identity for Beves, but we should not confuse this frame as the message the poem privileges. In fact, as will become clear, the actions that the poem describes often contradict the ways in which the narratorial frame attempts to present them. The narratorial frame depicts Beves as a knight from Hamtoun despite the fact that Beves's actions and choices trouble such a singular identity. One reason for this framing is the genre itself. The narrative workings of the Middle English romance make the reader complicit in its intent – that is, the reader assumes a ready-made role in reading the narrative. This narratorial frame operates by placing the reader in a position that both disseminates and receives the narrative at the same time. Referring to the difficulty in identifying the "I" of the Middle English romance, A. C. Spearing notes,

it seems easier to accept that the reason why this 'I' is hard to pin down to any specific role is that the pronoun does not refer to any being equivalent to a real person, but is simply part of the formulaic rhetoric of narration.

³⁷ Thorlac Turville-Petre sums up this mutability nicely: "In the search for Englishness that takes place in these works, writers pick out three principal criteria, representing the nation in terms of its territory, its people, and its language. We are English first because we inhabit England, secondly because we are the descendants of the first English settlers, and thirdly because we speak the language of England. Not one of these criteria is unproblematic. Each presents inconsistencies and contradictions, so that writers trying to project a tidy image of the nation have to confront, or more often conceal, those instances where imaginative construction is at odds with reality" (14).

No individualizing characteristics are attributed to it, any more than to the textual 'you' and 'we'; it is no more than an empty space to be occupied by any user of the poem, whether as reciter or as reader. (*Textual Subjectivity* 40)

The “rhetoric of narration” to which Spearing refers aids the narratorial frame, thrusting the reader into the role of both reader as narrator and reader as interpreter. Returning to the opening of the poem when the “I” says, “Of a kniȝt ich wile yoz rounē” (1), the narratorial frame here works in tandem with the generic rhetoric of the Middle English romance, forcing the reader to assume the narrator’s perspective. In this case, Beves is a knight. The poem has yet to offer evidence of Beves’s knightliness, but we naturally do not question the claim because it is an expectation we bring to the poem. Spearing further elucidates this rhetoric:

Any reader of the romances will be familiar with tags of that kind, in which the ‘I’ is associated almost exclusively with acts of telling and asseveration. There may be a narratorial ‘I,’ but it is usually only very intermittent in its occurrences, and in any case the narratives are heterodiegetic in the sense that ‘I’ is not part of the story being told but belongs only to the *rhetoric of telling*. The narrator is not realized as an experiencing subject, and indeed the very term ‘narrator,’ use of which has become virtually automatic in discussions of narrative, tends to blur the distinction between the living person who may have recited a romance to a medieval audience and the narratorial ‘I’ that is part of the romance’s text. (*Medieval Autographies* 18-19; my emphasis)

The “I” in the poem is a narrative mechanism that directs the reader to interpret the text in a specific way: to assume the perspective that Beves is of Hamtoun both by birth and by act. However, when the reader continues to read, he notices that Beves is neither a knight (initially) nor in Hamtoun (or England) for the majority of the poem.

The narratorial frame of the poem constantly marks Beves as of Hamtoun, but how far this marker goes to identify Beves as English, too, remains a bit muddy. There are moments in the poem (discussed below) that clearly serve to emphasize Beves as a progenitor, at least, or model, at best, of English heroism, but the majority of the assumption of Beves’s Englishness comes from critics. Critics of the poem seem to infer that Beves is an English knight – whether it be an unstated assumption or a conclusion from the romance’s placement in the Auchinleck manuscript. In fact, defining someone as English is somewhat problematic in the first place, considering this national identity would have been defined much differently in the thirteenth century than it is today.

Thorlac Turville-Petre has convincingly argued, “Despite their variety of genre, the texts of the [Auchinleck] manuscript have a shared perception of social roles and functions, and a shared concept of England, the state of its present and the contributions of its past. The Auchinleck manuscript is many things, but most importantly it is a handbook of the nation” (112). There is, then, a sense of Englishness that *The Romaunce of Sir Beves of Hamtoun* engages. The narratorial frame’s emphasis on “of Hamtoun” may be read as both a reassertion of Beves’s baronial lineage *and* his national identity. Crane explains:

In these works³⁸ the political and economic interests of the realm turn out to derive from those of the hero, validating his preoccupation with private concerns. The English hero is an adopted ancestor whose exploits and

³⁸ Middle English romances that stem from Anglo Norman source texts.

nobility establish and enhance the status of the insular aristocracy. His story typically traces the loss and recovery of his inherited lands and titles, not through historically mimetic fines, inheritance duties, and petitions to the king, but through a glorious exile, a righteous and sometimes bloody return, and a marriage blessed with sons who extend their father's holdings in a cyclical repetition of his story. (*Insular Romance* 23)

The narratorial frames insistence on reflecting Beves's exploits back onto his moniker "of Hamtoun" then also reflects more broadly onto England: Beves's actions are a microcosm of all of the English nobility. Crane further notes, "*Sir Beves of Hamtoun* undertakes an important development, whose beginnings are barely discernible in *Boeve*, from the perception of the baronial family as a political unit owing personal allegiance to rulers on the basis of reciprocal support, to a wider perception of national identity and the importance of national interests" (*Insular Romance* 59). With these reasons in mind, the majority of my argument understands the narratorial frame's demarcation of "of Hamtoun" to mean English; thus, my *modus operandi* will be to see how the actions that Beves takes throughout the poem trouble this narratorial framing in order to present the complexities of an English identity as I note above. Further, for the moments in which the narratorial frame and/or Beves points explicitly to his national identity – "Ingelonde" – I will consider how such specifically national references complicate further such an identity. (Revise.)

The Christian Knight Abroad: Act and Identity

Throughout the poem, Beves defines himself to those around him by his actions which do not always align with the narratorial frame. One of the first things the reader

recognizes about Beves in the beginning of the poem is his wrath and his inability to control himself, and yet the poem identifies self-control as a prerequisite of knighthood. Beves's lack of mastery of himself suggests to the reader that he is agent in the actions he takes and that he is more than a pawn of fate and chance. Furthermore, if Beves controls himself, the identities that he takes on are choices: Christian, Saracen, Hamtoun, Armenia, etc. The narrative's sustained attention to Beves's self-control complicates the narratorial frame because it demonstrates the role of choice in identity. The poem focuses on the issue of self-control after Beves's tirade against his mother for having his father, Guy, killed in which he calls her "Vile houre!" and claims he will kill her for her actions (302-18). Saber, Beves's uncle, is tasked with killing Beves, but, displaying his loyalty to Guy, Saber feigns that he has done so and then plans to send Beves out of the country to safety "In to anoþer lond" to be taught courtesy by "a riche erl" until he is old enough and "miȝt [his] self wilde" to return to England and to win his inheritance through war (362-72). Beves, according to Saber, must be in control of his will before he can attempt to reclaim his inheritance. This qualification proves prescient because directly after Saber instructs him to "lie low" until he can make arrangements, Beves proceeds to seek vengeance on his step-father and beats him with a club (443-47). Beves's lack of self-control here endangers not only himself but also Saber; after failing to heed Saber's counsel the first time, Beves listens after he has already ruined the plans and turns himself over to his mother (470-74, 491). Beves learns from his first mistake and demonstrates that he has quickly matured, learning to listen to reason.

This episode highlights the importance of Beves's ability to control himself in the poem because it will determine his success or failure as a knight. Had he controlled

himself and followed Saber's counsel, Beves would not be sent to the Middle East, but, as the narrative is still in progress, Beves's identity, too, is in progress. Despite the narratorial frame's insistence on a fixed identity for Beves, Beves's actions indicate that he must control himself in order to stabilize a given identity. The self-control that the narrative seeks for Beves is a matter of performance; that is, Beves's ability to control himself is intrinsically tied up in how he performs his identity as "of Hamtoun," Christian, a knight, etc. Susan Crane addresses how performance affects one's identity:

The relation of one performer to her own words and gestures is embedded in prior performances and contingent on how others understand her.

Performance studies take this troubling of agency as a productive link between individuals and their social situation: reiterative behavior recreates social relations, even reshapes beliefs and institutions.

'Performance' emerges . . . as an immensely compelling act at the intersection of agency and prescription, innovation and memory, self and social group. (*The Performance of Self* 3)

How Beves's identity is understood, then, relates directly to the ways in which he performs that identity. To perform a chosen identity, he must be in complete control of himself or else he risks misperforming and, consequently, being misidentified.

The identity that Beves most often performs throughout the poem is that of a Christian knight. His allegiance to his faith demands that he constantly differentiate himself from the Saracens with whom he otherwise peacefully cohabitates – often through violence. The narratorial frame at times seems to conflate Beves's identity as a Christian knight with his hailing from Hamtoun. The poem sets up an "us vs. them"

dichotomy of sorts, and so the establishment of religious difference seems to vicariously amount to regional difference, too. Beves, a Christian, must come from Christendom, of which Hamtoun is clearly a part. Beves is always named a Christian knight, and he performs that identity quite well. The problem for readers of the poem, then, is deciding whether in the poem a Christian knight, Beves, is also implicitly an English baronial knight, as some critics read him. The narratorial frame would like the reader to assume that Christian *implies* “of Hamtoun,” but the fact remains that these are two distinct identities. Siobhain Bly Calkin addresses Beves’s Christian identity:

The romance suggests that immersion in a Saracen world can tempt a Christian knight to stray from the path of righteousness, and exchange his native identity for a Saracen one. In response to this troubling possibility, the text elaborates a model of Christian heroism that emerges at moments of indeterminacy to assert unequivocally the hero’s ‘true’ identity and facilitate the establishment of inherited identity so central to medieval romance as a genre. (Calkin “The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange 138)

This textual elaboration that Calkin identifies is the narratorial frame through which the poem presents Beves’s actions to the reader. Focusing on Christianity as a defining feature that differentiates Beves from the Saracens does not necessarily draw the reader’s attention away from the (national) cultural assimilation that Beves undergoes otherwise (discussed below), but it subtly diverts the reader’s gaze elsewhere. It becomes, in essence, a diversionary tactic at times of heightened tension between Beves’s actions and the narratorial frame’s stated identity for him. After arriving in Ermonie, King Ermin

offers Beves his daughter to marry if he will convert from Christianity to what's ostensibly, in the poem, Islam. Beves vehemently rejects such a proposition:

“For gode!” queþ Beues, “þat i nolde
For al þe seluer ne al þe golde,
þat is vnder heuene liȝt,
Ne for þe douȝter, þat is so briȝt:
I nolde for-sake in none manere
Iesu, þat houȝte me so dere:
Al mote þai be doum and deue,
þat on þe false godes be-leue!” (561-68)

Beves will not renounce his Christianity, as he makes clear here, but the narrative seems unconcerned with the implications that such an offer would pose to his birthright in Hamtoun and to his Englishness. If Beves were to agree to the offer, he would become Ermin's heir, and even though this position would not disqualify him from his own inheritance in England, it surely would complicate matters. Beves, though, remains conspicuously silent about his destiny to win back Hamtoun with war. By drawing our attention to Beves's reassertion of his Christianity here and yet neglecting to include a similar reassertion of birthright/nationality, the narrative makes a conscious move to distinguish Beves through his religion rather than through his nationality because, perhaps, of its recognition of the difficulty this inherited narrative presents in that regard. The narratorial frame conflates religious and national/baronial identity to suggest that by preserving his Christianity, Beves, too, preserves his English identity, but Beves's actions throughout the narrative trouble this possibility.

The narratorial frame in *Sir Beves of Hamtoun* insists that Beves is English by way of tagging him “of Hamtoun” throughout the poem, yet Beves’s actions demonstrate that Englishness is a choice – one that Beves ultimately chooses not to make. The word “Ingelonde” appears only eleven times and does not appear anywhere in the poem until line 370, and even then it is used in a context indicating that Beves must leave first to escape his mother’s wrath before returning to “Ingelonde, / Wiþ werre” in order to win his inheritance (370-71). England, rather than his home, becomes a place to be invaded; it becomes the eventual martial goal of the Beves’s quest according to Saber. The narrative presents Englishness as something that Beves already has, but the actions that play out in the early stages of the poem indicate otherwise. Englishness is an accomplishment that Beves must strive – must make war – to achieve. Beves identifies himself for the first time as being from “Ingelonde” after he arrives in Ermonie: “Iboren ich was in Ingelonde, / At Hamtoun, be þe se stronde” (543-44). This reference to England serves as an explanation to King Ermyn of Beves’s origin. Curiously, this example is the only use of “Ingelonde” as a way of identifying from where Beves hails and is the only direct reference to England as Beves’s heritage until he renounces England altogether, leaving Saber in charge of Hamtoun: “Ingelonde ich wil for-swere; / Min eir ich wile make her / Þis gode kniȝt, min em Saber” (3578-80). The word is used to reference place (1977, 2998, 3051, 3548, 4025, 4273) for the rest of the poem until its final use in which the narrator informs the reader that King Edgar (the king of England) has given his daughter “And after is day al Ingelonde” to Miles, Beves’s son (4557-58). Curiously, directly after Edgar grants Miles all of England as his inheritance, Beves returns to Mombraunt where he is king (4574) and leaves Hamtoun to his uncle, Saber (4575-76). By the end of the

poem, then, Beves completely forfeits his inheritance, expatriating himself to the Middle East where he will eventually die and be buried.

Breaking “Ingelonde”: Beves [of Ermonie]

Beve's initial entry in the Saracen country of Ermonie (Armenia) results from his rash decision to ignore Saber's counsel and to attack his stepfather, and it is significant that it is Beves's mother who orders him to be sold out of the country “in to hebenesse” (500). External forces drive Beves from his home, Hamtoun, and in so doing, necessitate that he actively work to reclaim his birthplace and his identity, too. This moment of the narrative establishes the link between Beves's Englishness and the self-control that he must possess before he can return to England as a knight to recapture his inheritance. Interestingly, Beves departs from England in order to learn to control himself: he will become self-willed abroad in Ermonie, which seems to be odd if he is supposed to be an exemplar English knight. Beves's mother, who initiates this cultural break, is not English herself – she is Scottish: “Þe kinges douzter of Scotlonde” (26). Of course, marrying Beves's father, Guy, would seem to erase her previous national affiliations as she, essentially, became the property of her new husband, but the trajectory of the narrative makes clear her unhappiness in her situation. Within thirty lines after being introduced, the narrative marks Guy's wife as unfaithful because of a previous relationship with the emperor of Almayne and her unhappiness that her “lord is olde & may nouzt werche, / Al dai him is leuer at cherche” (34-36, 58-59). This unhappiness motivates her to plot against Guy so that the emperor of Almayne will surprise Guy in the forest and cut off his head to bring back to her (86-105). The plan succeeds, leading to Beves's dismay, rash action, and eventual submission to his mother's will to send him away. Beves's exile from

England is doubly problematic, then, because he has been exiled from Hamtoun and England by his mother who is a figure, for all intents and purposes, no more English than the Saracens with whom Beves will stay throughout his youth. This action – Beves’s mother exiling Beves – forces Beves to choose to retake his birthplace and, implicitly, his identity. Corinne Saunders explains, “*Beves* in fact treats the issue of identity in an extended and often subtle fashion: the narrative explores the complicated interrelation of desire, will and intention, and the intersection of these with divine providence” (31). Beves’s exile should serve as a means of differentiating him from the Saracens by whom he is surrounded, yet this does not happen. Like his mother's choices that mark her as other-than-English, Beves's choices, once he gains self-will, reveal his own troubled English identity. The narratorial frame attempts to present Beves as always exercising an English identity, but too often Beves’s actions distinctly mark him as other-than-Hamtoun, other-than-English.

Beves's lack of self-will further undoes the narratorial frame’s insistence on his English identity. Despite vehemently protesting the suggestion of forsaking Christianity, Beves acquiesces rather tacitly to Ermin's absorption of him into his household and, later, his knights. Ermin tells Beves:

"Beves, while þow ert swain,
þow schelt be me chaumberlain,
And þow schelt, whan þow ert dobbed kniȝt,
Me baner bere in to eueri fiȝt!" (571-74)

Beves will not only fight for Ermin, he will bear his banner - a position of honor for a knight. Moreover, Beves, by bearing the banner, signifies Ermonie; his body itself is

appropriated to signify a national identity other than English - other than the identity upon which the narratorial frame insists. Such appropriation bespeaks uncanny similarity between English and Saracen knights. As Calkin acknowledges, "the two supposedly different groups have one common identity – that of knightliness. Warriors may be Saracen or Christian in these texts, but they share criteria for the evaluation of people's social standing, methods of battle, ideas about suitable recompense for martial endeavor, and concepts of how divinity is manifested in their worlds" (*Saracens and the Making of English Identity* 30). Beves, though foreign, proves to be a willing substitute for a Saracen knight in service to Ermin when he responds, "'What ze me hoten, don ich wil!'" (576), indicating that he both acknowledges and accepts what Ermin has said. Beves will perform the duties that Ermin assigns to him despite the fact that, in doing so, he troubles the English identity that the narrative is so keen to assert for him. Rather than asserting his Englishness with the same power that he asserted his Christianity, Beves accepts Ermin's will and, in so doing, subtly denies his birthplace, Hamtoun, and implicitly his Englishness.

Recognizing the jeopardy of such a position of sameness with the Saracens for the English Beves, the narrative shifts to focus on Beves's actions that differentiate Beves from the Saracens around him. Beves is unaware that it is Christmas Day, for which he is mocked by a Saracen knight; as a result, Beves must enact his Christian identity to make up for this demonstrated lack. To do so, he kills all of the Saracens: "Ne was þer non, þat miȝt ascape, / So Beues slouȝ hem in a rape." (642-43). Separation results from such violence, and Calkin rightly argues, "The only reason for Beves's sudden change in comportment seems to be a somewhat unfocused need to affirm to himself as violently as

possible that he is different from the world in which he finds himself" (*Saracens and the Making of English Identity* 58). This ultraviolent action serves as a reminder to the reader of Beves's difference from the Saracens with whom he has been living - a narrative intervention that Robert Allen Rouse interprets as a concern "about cultural hybridity, the fear that Christian English identity might be dangerously similar to that of the Saracens" (119). Rouse is right to note the narrative's concern about the Christian English identity of Beves, but, as I have pointed out already, it is hard to claim that a reassertion of Christianity is also a reassertion of Englishness. Directly after marking this separation between Christian and Saracen, the narrative fails to suggest the further differentiation of English from Saracen. Instead, the narrator tells the reader "Beues hom be-gan to ride" (645). "Hom" refers to Ermin's court rather than Hamtoun or England - the home that the narratorial frame of this posits for Beves. After he arrives and Ermin finds out what he has done, Ermin wants to punish Beves, but Josian intervenes and asks that he hear both sides of the story (657-70). Her kindness is repaid poorly by Beves who, when approached by Josian's messengers, continues his Christian tirade against Saracens, concluding "Ȝhe is an [heþene] honde, also be ȝe, / Out of me chaumber swiþe ȝe fle!" (693-94). Even though Beves's actions distinguish his Christian identity, the glaring absence of any extant action to distinguish Beves as English undermines the narrative's ability to claim him as such.

The narrative acknowledges the lack of self-control that Beves exhibits in the previous episode by shifting the focus away from the tension between Christian and Saracen identities for a time to instead focus on Beves coming into his own as a knight. The strongly anti-Saracen rhetoric and action Beves uses in slaying Ermin's knights and

threatening Josian's messengers serves, according to Calkin, for Beves to "re-manifest his right to the appellation of Christian English knight" ("Defining Christian Knighthood in a Saracen World" 134). Calkin is correct insofar as the narratorial frame is concerned: these actions are clearly a move to try to recuperate Beves's Christian, English identity. However, Beves is not yet a knight. The context in which he achieves knighthood only further troubles his English identity. The distinct "us" versus "them" dynamic from the previous episode is more blurry during Beves's next adventure, which focuses on Beves's ability to control his will and to seek counsel outside of himself. Geraldine Barnes argues that Beves must incline himself to heed "wise counsel before taking action and, instead of following his own rash inclinations, [seek] advice" (83). By listening to others, Beves may control the wrathful reactions that characterize his actions up and to this point in the narrative. The narrative marks this shift: "His oper *prowessee* who wil lere, / Hende, herkneþ, and 3e mai here!" (737-38; my italics). The narratorial frame announces these actions before they begin as "prowess," rhetorically projecting an interpretation of the act before the reader has even seen it. Beves beheads a particularly nasty wild boar, which is undoubtedly prowess, but the way in which he defeats the boar reflects his growth as a knight - his control of himself. Before leveling the death-stroke on the boar, "Beues made is praier / To god and Mari, is moder dere" that he should defeat it (803-04). In other words, Beves asks for help. This prayer further reflects on Beves as a Christian and also on his recognition of his own limits.

Beves becomes further entrenched in the Saracen context of the poem when King Ermin knights and arms him. Even though Beves has learned the self-will necessary of a knight, the way in which he becomes a knight problematizes the Englishness through

which the narratorial frame presents his identity. Ermin's kingdom and Josian are threatened by Brademond, and Ermin knights Beves after Josian reveals how Beves defeated the evil steward and his knights single-handedly and claims Beves could protect them from this external threat (837-908, 934-59). Ermin responds by knighting Beves and making Beves his banner-bearer for the battle: "Knigt ich wile þe make: / Þou schelt bere in to bataile / Me baner, Brademond to asaile!" (964-66). Beves gladly accepts this offer and task, responding "'Blepelich . . . be þe rod!'" (968), and while this oath marks Beves as Christian, nothing stands to reassert his Englishness. Beves finally has become a knight, but he has been knighted by a Saracen and bears the banner of that foreign king. Furthermore, Beves wears Saracen armor and wields Saracen weaponry. He won Morgelay, his sword, by defeating the Saracen steward earlier, and Ermin arms him with "a scheld gode & sur / Wip þre eglen of asur" (971-72).³⁹ The final piece of his knightly accoutrement is his horse, Arondel, which Josian gives to him. Every outward identifier provided to Beves marks him as a Saracen rather than an Englishman. Crane notes of such heraldic identifiers in relation to identity: "A knight augments his stature by performing it so overtly, but the risk of misjudgment complicates his relation to the community of peers who certify his identity" (*The Performance of Self* 8). The risk that Beves incurs here specifically is that he seems to be a Saracen knight fighting for one group of Saracens against another group of Saracens. Outside of the narratorial frame that presents Beves as a character and his story, the reader would not recognize Beves as an English knight.

³⁹ The heraldry of the three blue eagles seems to allude to Muslims in general and, perhaps, to the historical figure of Saladin in particular. Paul E. Walker notes that Saladin was the "Muslim sultan of Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine, founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, and the most famous of Muslim heroes. In wars against the Christian Crusaders, he achieved great success with the capture of Jerusalem (October 2, 1187), ending its nearly nine decades of occupation by the Franks" ("Saladin").

During the battle against Brademond, Beves proves his skill as a knight, but the moments when the narrative continues to demonstrate Beves's Christianity are again void of any such reassurance in regards to his Englishness. During the fight, the narrative tells the reader:

And Sire Beues, þe cristene kniȝt
Slouȝ ase mani in þat fiȝt
Wiþ Morgelay him self alone,
As þai deden euerichone. (1011-14)

The narratorial frame reasserts that Beves is a Christian knight in what is rather a crucial moment. This battle is Beves's first as a knight, but nothing about this battle marks him as English or as Christian. He is bearing the banner of King Ermin, riding a Saracen horse, and slaughtering other Saracens with a famous Saracen sword. Calkin summarizes the Saracen context to which I have been pointing repeatedly:

In narrating the exploits of an English hero, it repeatedly situates him, and develops his identity, in relation to the world in which he lives after having been sold to Saracens. Saracens raise Bevis, knight him and arm him; they communicate his universal desirability as son, love and warrior; they serve under him and help him to reclaim his heritage and avenge his father's murder; they also afford Bevis opportunities to manifest his exemplary Christianity. In short, Saracens define Bevis's status as a heroic Christian knight. ("Defining Christian Knighthood in a Saracen World" 127)

I agree with Calkin's assessment, but I am taking her argument a step further to argue that the narratorial frame becomes so set on showing religious difference that it neglects to

reassert the national difference - that is, Beves's Englishness - that it assumes from the very beginning of the poem as I have shown. The narratorial frame encourages the reader to constantly read the actions of Beves, as Calkin writes above, as "the exploits of an English hero," yet the actions themselves tell a different story. After his success in battle, "Beues rode hom," referring to Ermonie (again) instead of Hamtoun. Beves's reference to Ermonie as "home" problematizes the narrative's presentation of his Englishness. Rather than establishing his identity as an English knight, Beves's actions continually undo such an identity.

There and Back (and There and Back) Again: Josian, Cultural Hybridity, and Context

As I have been arguing thus far, the narratorial framing of Beves as an English knight becomes undone by the actions that Beves takes as the narrative progresses. By coming to age in exile, Beves has all of the outward signs of being a Saracen rather than an English knight, and it is only through a concerted effort of Beves's crusader-like violent actions toward Saracens and the narrator's constant reminders that the reader remembers Beves's Christianity. Moving forward as an initiated knight, Beves sets his sights on reclaiming his inheritance in Hamtoun by carrying out the vengeance that moved him to the irrational actions that sent him unceremoniously into exile in Ermonie in the first place. Now that Beves is a knight, the narrative must somehow bring him back to England, and along the way the narrative continues to frame Beves as an English knight despite the fact that his actions reveal that he has assimilated into a Saracen culture while maintaining a staunch Christianity. Furthermore, Beves's actions in becoming English only exacerbate the underlying tensions of his identity as an adventurer

abroad and his identity, from the narrative's point of view, as a native of Hamtoun in England. The narrative has placed a large emphasis on right since the beginning of the poem, and this idea of right becomes especially important moving forward as the narratorial frame seeks to justify the actions that Beves takes. Saunders remarks on the poem's use of right: "The romance is dominated by the ideas of 'right', which runs through it like a leitmotif. The term functions as both a noun and adjective, to refer to the right of heritage, lost and regained by Beves, and the right of marriage, in terms of age, religion and love, but also the giving and taking of right counsel, right chivalric behaviour and right Christian belief" (33-34). This emphasis on right is especially pertinent after Beves has been knighted. It is as if right matters more so when one has the agency to act upon it, and because Beves has achieved such agency by becoming a knight, the remainder of the poem figures into an exploration of Beves's rights - property, persons, and, really, identities. In this exploration, Beves's actions and choices further undo the narrative's presentation of him as English. As earlier in the poem, Beves's Christianity remains strong as ever, but the framing of English and Christian as one and the same identity comes undone.

One of the driving currents in the narrative is the relationship between Beves and Josian that continually reminds the reader of Beves's connection to Saracen culture and perhaps a Saracen identity despite framing attempts in the narrative to redirect the reader's attention elsewhere. Much of Beves's action throughout his stay in Ermony is somehow anchored in his eventual betrothal to Josian, and after he leaves Ermony and the Middle East, he must go back to rescue her. Of course, this union is initially delayed because of Josian's belief in false (Muslim) gods, but Beves never voices pause to

marrying her because she is not English. In fact, the only character ever to suggest that Beves should marry an English woman is King Ermin in a lie that he tells to Josian (1441). By marrying Josian, Beves symbolically enters into the Saracen context in a subtle and (what seems) a non-threatening way. Such a union complicates Beves's English identity. Joanne Charbonneau and Desiree Cromwell identify such a move as inherently gendered: "Other texts undermine the male's independence and self-determination by carving out a space within which women serve a critically important function as catalysts for knightly pursuits. In these works, male ambitions are not independent of female input, and in fact the feminine becomes the driving force propelling male identity formation" (106). Josian serves as a catalyst for the formation of a hybrid identity of English and Saracen for both Beves and later his sons Gii and Miles. Her promise to convert to appease Beves fully supports his Christian identity that the narrative has trumpeted time and again; again, it would seem that the narrative equates Christian and English (1196). Calkin touches on this when she claims that "Josianne demonstrates ways in which people's anxieties about the accuracy of a claimed identity can be allayed. His experiences suggest that while an individual's own assertion of a specific group affiliation must be regarded with some suspicion, the behavior of others can testify to the veracity of the assumed identity" (*Saracens and the Making of English Identity* 62). Beves's acceptance of Josian's conversion support her new identity of Christian, but the opposite seems to be true of Beves. Others, rather than display signs of acknowledging Beves's Englishness, behave in a way that testifies to his cosmopolitan and/or foreign identity. Beves's ongoing relationship with Josian clearly contributes to this identity, compromising a clear and unquestionable English identity for Beves.

Even though this conversion alleviates the narrative's concern with Beves's Christian identity, it actually complicates Beves's ability to return to England to arrive at the English identity upon which the narratorial frame insists. After Beves and Josian make their lovers' pact (1197-1200), a meddlesome chamberlain lies to King Ermin that Beves has deflowered his daughter (1209), causing Ermin to send Beves off carrying a letter that "bereþ . . . is owene deþ" (1261). This betrayal is a necessary mechanism of the narrative to create separation between Beves and the Saracen culture in which he has immersed himself (and now has agreed to marry into), but while carrying the letter, Beves further marks himself other than English. He encounters his cousin Terri along the road, and after Terri inquires as to whether he knows of the whereabouts of a child from South Hamtoun named Beves. Beves curiously lies to Terri: "'Hit is nouzt,' a seide, 'gon longe, / I sez þe Sarsins þat child an-honge!'" (1307-08). Beves separates himself from his English cousin through this lie by choosing not to reveal himself to him. Furthermore, he separates himself from Hamtoun and England by announcing that the child who had once been has died – has transformed into a cultural hybrid identity of a Christian in Saracen lands. Beves more closely associates himself with his Saracen ties when he dismisses a rather clairvoyant moment in which Terri suggests Beves may carry a letter instructing his own death. Instead, Beves claims of Ermin, "'He ne wolde loue me non oper, / Þan ich were is owene broþer'" (1331-32). In denying Terri, Beves symbolically denies the English identity that the narrative posits. "The Auchinleck text contains no suggestion that Beves must maintain a disguise, or that he might expose himself to danger if he identified himself to his cousin," Calkin observes, "Instead, a troubling desire for a Saracen life and family seems to motivate Beves' rejection of his English,

Christian family" ("The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange" 141). By concealing his identity and feigning his own death, Beves erases himself from the English landscape, perhaps setting the stage for his surprise "invasion" later in the poem.

The narratorial frame quickly attempts to assuage Beves's blatant breaking of English ties by describing Beves reasserting a Christian identity. Ermin, in the next episode, betrays Beves, which seems to be an attempt to separate Beves from Saracen ties, and yet Josian's faith in Beves subtly undermines this effort. Immediately after Beves parts with Terri, he runs to a Muslim temple and "slouȝ here prest, þat þer was in, / And þrew here godes in þe fen" (1355-56). Again, though, the narrative finds no way to reassert an English identity for Beves, so it relies on a showing of Christian identity to shift the reader's focus away from the previous episode. This shift is a machination of the Middle English romance, as Calkin posits: "Such a choice [of a Saracen life over a Christian life], however, is an impossibility for the hero of a Middle English romance, and the narrative quickly depicts an encounter that clearly differentiates Beves from his Saracen 'brothers' and reasserts his Christian heroism" ("The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange" 142). This refocus of the narrative's action blatantly exposes the narratorial framing to which I have been pointing throughout this chapter. Beves's actions, as Calkin so nicely puts, are an impossibility for his role as the hero of the narrative; thus, the narrative redirects the reader's attention to a role that is possible - that of the Christian crusader casting down idols and Muslim priests. The narrative further frames Beves's situation by revealing what Calkin calls "Saracen perfidy" ("The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange" 143), Ermin's betrayal in the letter to Brademond. Interestingly, the letter instructed Brademond to kill Beves, but because Beves spared his life earlier in the poem,

he repays the mercy (somewhat) by casting him instead into a dungeon (1065-68, 1412-18). Ermin additionally betrays Beves by lying to Josian about what has happened: he fabricates a story that Beves returned to England and married "þe kinges dougter of Ingelonde" (1441). Josian is then married off to King Yvor of Mombraunt (1453), but not before she makes a display of fidelity to Beves, demonstrating that, despite the narrative's repositioning, Beves's Saracen connections remain. She praises Beves and promises to remain faithful:

"Beuoun,
Hende knigt of Souþ-Hamtoun,
Naddestow me neuer for-sake,
Ȝif sum tresoun hit nadde make:
Ac for þe loue, þat was so gode,
þat i louede ase min hertte blode,
Ichaue," ȝhe seide, "a ring on,
þat of swiche vertu is þe ston:
While ichaue on þat ilche ring,
To me schel noman haue welling,
And, Beues!" ȝhe seide, "be god aboue,
I schel it weren for þe loue!" (1463-74)

King Yvor's kidnapping of Josian will further provoke questions about Beves's Englishness because it eventually ends in Beves's conquering and ruling of Mombraunt (discussed below). This connection, moreover, is quite a deal more dangerous to his English identity than any of those he has previously had with Saracens. This troth

between them suggests an admixture of English and Saracen through the children that they will have.

The narratorial frame attempts to create space between Beves and Josian by interweaving a series of feats reminding the reader of Beves's Christianity; however, Beves ultimately must reunite with Josian before he can move on to England. The interlude of Christian feats reads more like a saint's legend than a romance: Beves escapes Brademond's dungeon through prayer (1645-53), defeats King Grander "þourȝ help of Crist" (1769), prays to Christ to be able to ride his horse on water to escape Brademond and his host pursuing him (1795-1809), and defeats Grander's brother, a Muslim giant, in God's name (1895). After all of these feats of the Christian knight, though, Beves decides that he must return to Josian before attempting to return to England, which further delays this return. Beves continues his cycle of praying for guidance in making his decision to retrieve Josian before attempting to return to England:

"Lord," a þouȝte, "whar mai i gone?

Whar ich in to Ingelonde fare?

Nai," a þouȝte, "what scholde i þare,

Boute ȝif ichadde ost to gader,

For to sle me stifader?"

He þouȝte, þat he wolde an hie

In to þe londe of Ermonie,

To Ermonie þat was is bane,

To his lemman Iosiane. (1976-84)

Beves at first wants to go to England, but he realizes that such a move without an army would be useless. Then, he decides to find his lover, Josian, and the narrator juxtaposes, through the rhyme, Beves's contradictory feelings about going to Ermonie. On one hand, Ermin has betrayed him, but on the other, he has made a commitment to his lover to whom he willingly returns. All of the distance created between Beves and his Saracen connections over hundreds of lines by focusing on betrayal and fighting against Saracens has been undone by Beves's insistence on finding his lover, who is his greatest tie to a possible Saracen identity for him.

Beves's decision to seek Josian before continuing on to England to reclaim his inheritance marks a series of divergences that either delay his return to Hamtoun or cause him to leave Hamtoun and that display his reliance on Saracens. Upon returning to Ermony to find Josian, Beves discovers that she has been married off to King Yvor of Mombraunt against her will (2007-12). Beves initially doubts Josian's fidelity to him, assuming that she clearly had to have consummated the marriage, but she eventually convinces him that she has remained faithful, encouraging him to continue on his quest to Hamtoun:

"Merci," ȝhe seide, "lemman fre,
Led me hom to þe contre,
And boute þe finde me maide wimman,
Be þat eni man saie can,
Send me aȝen to me fon
Al naked in me smok alon!" (2201-06)

Despite linking Beves to Saracen culture, Josian motivates Beves to return to Hamtoun, and Josian refers to Hamtoun as home for Beves, which is the first instance of such a reference in the entire poem. Josian simultaneously marks Beves here as both of Hamtoun and yet away from Hamtoun. Beves makes to immediately return to Hamtoun, but the narrative turns again, forcing Beves to deal with King Yvor rather than go home (2209-92). To outwit Garcy, the necromancer who King Yvor has left in charge of Mombraunt, Beves takes advice from Bonefas, another Saracen, to find an herb in the forest to put into Garcy's wine so that he goes into a deep sleep (2296-308). This episode illustrates Beves's reliance on Saracen knowledge to escape from this predicament. Additionally, Bonefas advises Beves to hide in a cave, in which there are, of course, two lions who then eat Bonefas and leave Josian untouched, affirming to Beves her fidelity and virginity (2340-94). After battling Ascopard, a giant sent by Garcy, and sparing his life at Josian's behest, Beves arrives in Cologne, but he would not have been able to do so without the help of Ascopard, a Saracen (2549-70). Throughout the entirety of this episode, Beves's ties to the Saracen context are reinforced rather than weakened, and these events leading to such entrenchment in the Saracen context result from Beves returning to reunite with Josian.

Immediately after they arrive in Cologne, Beves realizes his uncle, Saber Florentin, is the bishop there and seeks him to baptize Josian. Josian, now Christian, has lost her only distinguishing characteristic from Beves. In other words, the difference between Saracen and Englishman in the narrative rests so heavily upon religious difference that, with this impediment removed, Josian is literally no different than Beves (who by all accounts is nearly as Saracen as she is). The narrative senses this sameness

and attempts to establish Beves's place within the great lineage of English heroes who have slain dragons:

After Iosian is cristing
Beues dede a gret fizting,
Swich bataile dede neuer non
Cristene man of flesch ne bon,
Of a dragoun þer be side,
Pat Beues slouȝ þer in þat tide,
Saue sire Launcelet de Lake,
He fauȝt wiþ a fur drake,
And Wade dede also,
& neuer kniȝtes boutē þai to,
& Gij a Warwick, ich vnder-stonde,
Slouȝ a dragoun in Norþ-Homberlonde. (2597-2608)

To frame Beves as a Christian English knight, the narrator uses the names and deeds of these established English heroes against which to juxtapose the feat that Beves is about to accomplish. Like these heroes, Beves slays a dragon in the tradition of the St. George legend. The Auchinleck text adds this event to the narrative, as Judith Weiss has shown, in order that the reader is “reminded that [Beves] is an *English* knight who conquers the dragon” (72). After Beves has fought to exhaustion, he drinks from a holy well and is revived. The narrator then informs the reader that Beves invokes St. George before continuing his battle:

A nemenede sein Gorge, our leuedi kniȝt,

And sete on his helm, þat was brigȝt;
And Beves wiþ eger mode
Out of þe welle sone a ȝode;
Þe dragoun harde him asaile gan,
He him defendeþ ase a man. (2816-22)

Beves, here, regains his strength through drinking from the well, but his invocation of St. George is a move by the narrative to remind the audience of the frame – that Beves is an English knight. The narrative casts the remainder of the battle with the dragon in Christian terms, drawing particular attention Beves's reliance on prayer to overcome the dragon:

“Help,” [Beves] saide, “godes sone,
Þat þis dragoun wer ouer-come!
Boute ich mowe þe dragoun slon,
Er þan ich hennes gon,
Schel hit neuere aslawe be
For noman in cristente!” (2861-66)

Beves overcomes the dragon through praying to Jesus, noting that he is the only man who can deliver Christianity from this evil dragon. The narrative links Beves, then, to St. George through the original invocation and also through the exclusivity of Beves in defeating the dragon. Yet, Beves's victory over the dragon is more a matter of his Christian identity than it is with his supposed English identity. His defeat of the dragon has little to do with England in the poem itself; rather, it serves to differentiate him from Josian and other Saracens who have been portrayed so similarly to him. Beves defeats the

dragon not on behalf of England but instead on behalf of Cologne, where the people “Þankede Iesu of þat gras” (2910). The narrative leaves this section of the poem by reaffirming the Christian element of Beves’s victory, likening him to English heroes and yet leaving this comparison unfulfilled considering Beves’s defeat of the dragon does not directly impact Hamtoun, England, and the people there.

By marrying Josian and then impregnating her, Beves undermines the English identity with which the narratorial frame presents him. After defeating the dragon, Beves eventually returns to England to secure his inheritance from his stepfather Devoun⁴⁰, but he leaves Josian in Cologne where she is, unsurprisingly, carried off by an earl named Miles (3122-74). The bond that Beves has with Josian compels him to physically go abroad yet again in order retrieve Josian after he had just returned to England, where business remains unfinished. Hamtoun remains in Devoun's power. The narrative describes Beves arriving to save Josian from being burned at the stake: "Beues on Arondel com renne / Wiþ is swerd Morgelay" (3292-93). The identifying markers of Beves during this scene are only his horse and sword, both Saracen in origin. Nowhere is his Englishness alluded to; moreover, after rescuing Josian, Beves returns to the Isle of Wight with her and Ascopard, bringing Saracens with him into England (3299-304). Beves, reunited with Josian, retakes Hamtoun, which would seem to fulfill the English identity with which the narrative has associated him from the beginning. Beves completes the revenge he has sought since the beginning of the text, but then he is married to Josian by his uncle (from Cologne) (3475-77). Beves, who has been away from Hamtoun and England for his entire adult life, is married to an outsider by another outsider.

Additionally, Beves begets two children from Josian. These two children, Gii and Miles,

⁴⁰I address the specifics of this return below in the next section.

are English lineally speaking, and yet they serve as reminders of Beves's life and actions abroad. They physically symbolize Beves's identity caught between English and Saracen. In fact, when Beves leaves Gii with a forester and Miles with a fisherman to be fostered because he believes Josian is dead,⁴¹ he specifically asks the forester "Wiltow lete cristen þis *heþen* childe?" (3734; my italics). Beves marks his own child as a heathen because it is unbaptized; but figuratively this language points to the in-between identity of the child - neither English Christian nor Saracen. And, again, directly after giving birth, Josian is taken captive by Ascopard (3588-94)⁴² (which is why Beves thinks she died) and removed to a tower. After Saber rescues Josian and they are both reunited with Beves, Terri, Gii, and Miles (3888),⁴³ they all make to return to England by way of Ermony. Beves cannot seem to escape his Saracen roots, which he willingly acquired through marriage and then his children.

Traveling to Ermonie delays Beves from returning to Hamtoun, which will lead to complications there, but Beves also reprises his role as Ermin's defender, reminding the reader of the variety of allegiances and, therefore, various identities that Beves performs. Although the narrative attempts to refocus these identities through a repetition of Christian violence, Beves re-entrenches himself abroad through his success. Beves defeats King Yvor, but allows him to be ransomed from Ermin back to Mombraunt (3985-4004). Ermin, old and dying, bequeaths his kingdom to Beves's son, Gii, but to mediate the ramifications of this inheritance on the English identity that the narrative postures, Beves and Gii "Al þe londe of Ermony / Hii made cristen wiþ dente of sword"

⁴¹Beves, Terri, and Josian are all abroad, having fled from England because of an altercation involving Arondel and King Edgar's son in which the prince dies. This event merits independent analysis below.

⁴²Ascopard leaves Beves's service to return to King Yvor because Beves replaces him with Terri as his page.

⁴³See 3893-936 for the trials Saber and Josian endure before reuniting with Beves *et al.*

(4018-19). Violence is the means through which Beves differentiates himself (and his sons) from Saracens, as Calkin has shown (“The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange” 140). Although this method of differentiation is troubling to a modern reader, it is common for medieval Christianity; moreover, this violence demonstrates the importance of act in establishing and/or demonstrating one’s identity. Converting Ermonie makes it a less threatening space to the English identity of Beves and now, too, his son Gii. Soon thereafter, Beves goes to war against Yvor. The narrative emphasizes the difference between Saracen and Christian in this episode, attempting to alleviate the similarity of the fighters on either side:

To hire godes þai bede in eiþer side;
Beues bad help to Marie sone
And king Yuor to sein Mahoune;
Ase Beues bad helpe to Marie,
To Teruagaunt Yuor gan crie,
Þat he scholde helpe him in þat fiȝt,
Also he was king of meche miȝt. (4144-50)

The narrative reveals sameness in action here despite intending to highlight difference. Of course the intercessors to which each side prays are different, but the action itself is the same. Neither side appeals directly to God; instead, each appeals to a chief prophet and then a lesser one. Later, Beves and Yvor are juxtaposed again in a similar way, but this time Beues defeats Yvor:

Beues, the kniȝt of cristene lawe,
Wiþ Morgelay a smot him þo,

Ɔat his scheld he clef ato,
And his left hond, be þe wrest
Hit fleȝ awei þourȝ help of Crist. (4204-08)

The first two lines juxtapose two statements that seem contradictory: Beves is the knight of Christian law and he carries out that law with Morgelay, a sword of Saracen origin.

Beves wins the battle because he is a Christian: the narrative does not seem to pay attention to the national identities at stake here or, perhaps, assumes the reader will reflect Beves's victory onto the English identity the narratorial frame poses for him. When "Ɔo crouneȝe þai Beues king in Ɔat lond" (4253), however, the tension between frame and action grows too great to leave unquestioned. Beves of Hamtoun now rules Mombraunt, and even though he remains emphatically Christian, the reader should question the narrative's English assertions with such Saracen context in mind.

Mombraunt occupies an especially vexed place in this poem because it is in the poem, in many ways, a fantasized Christian English outpost in the Middle East yet it also most thoroughly undermines Beve's identity as an English knight. Beves wins Mombraunt from a Saracen, Yvor, and makes it his home because he has self-imposed exile from England. He will return to England once more to secure his inheritance after King Edgar has begun to encroach (discussed below), but then he retires to Mombraunt, "þer he was king; / And his erldom in Hamte-schire / a ȝaf to his em Sabere" (4574-76). Beves finally achieves peace by the end of the narrative, but he does not achieve said peace and then settle in Hamtoun or England to enjoy it - he settles in Mombraunt. This final choice speaks volumes for Beves's identity, for he has already defeated any opposition he had in England that would prevent him from returning to his birthplace and

supposed home. Calkin concludes concerning this choice: "Thus, while Beves asserts through violence, prayer, and divine favour his identity as an English Christian knight, his Saracen upbringing and assimilation cannot be utterly eradicated, and as a result, Beves can never truly be at home in an English, Christian world" ("The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange" 146). Mombraunt, then, serves in the poem as a liminal space between English and Saracen because it was conquered through righteous Christian violence. It, like Beves, is neither English Christian nor Saracen, yet Mombraunt is necessary for the narrative to dispose of Beves because he has so clearly chosen not to participate in an identity that marks Hamtoun and England as his home. Crane's comments on the role of the baronial English hero are pertinent here: "The romance denies its own assertions with respect to nationhood whenever those assertions interfere with Bevis's access to rights and rank. The underlying impetus of *Beves of Hamtoun* remains baronial, and any conflicting elements of national ideology are resisted" (*Insular Romance* 62). Because Miles has become the heir to the throne, Beves no longer needs to assert his rights; thus, he removes himself from the English context of the narrative altogether. Finally, as Beves falls ill, Josian sends for Gii and Terry, but not Miles. Miles's absence at his father's deathbed signifies the finality of the break between Beves and England; moreover, Beves and Josian are both buried and a chapel is erected to memorialize them - not in England but abroad in Mombraunt (4607-12).

London Calling, or My Country for a Horse: Recapturing Inheritance

The most glaring issues with the actions that Beves takes in securing his rights are how often he does so under an identity that is not English, with the help of others who are not English, and by killing Englishmen in the process. We notice that Beves regains his

inheritance via invasion rather than restoration when we examine the actions Beves takes to retake Hamtoun and, eventually, to sack London. Beves uses guile and deceit to overcome his stepfather in Hamtoun by disguising himself and his men, who are from Cologne, as Frenchman and by mercilessly throwing knights overboard from Hamtoun on his way to unite his foreign knights with his uncle Saber's forces. Beves's use of deception here further problematizes the English identity that the narratorial frame posits because Beves is both invading what is ostensibly his home. Once Beves and Saber combine forces, they eventually oust Beves's stepfather from Hamtoun (3365-474). Beves does not keep his seat at Hamtoun for long, however, and leaves his lands to his uncle after he (Beves) is left with the choice of parting with his horse or fleeing the country for treason (3558-84). This willful separation saves Beves's life, perhaps, but it is more clearly a move to save his horse's life. Arondel, as established earlier, is a Saracen horse given to Beves by King Ermin, and though the relationship between a knight and his horse is important to any romance, Beves's preference of his horse over what the narrative would call his home is curious. During the interim of Beves's absence in Hamtoun, King Edgar begins seizing lands, forcing Beves to return to (re)reclaim Hamtoun (4262-72). Beves lays siege to London with the aid of his sons Miles and Gii, causing the Thames to run red with blood (4497-4540). King Edgar, clearly defeated, brokers peace by marrying his daughter to Miles, thus making Miles heir to the throne and elevating Beves's future lineage to the status of king (4557-60). Beves is only able to secure an English identity for his future heirs by slaying a number of Englishmen with his sons (who are lineally English yet appear otherwise) and with forces from his kingdom abroad, Mombraunt (4273-76). Despite the narrative's desire to reflect these actions on

the English hero figure in Beves, each action in isolation demonstrates the multifaceted nature of Beves's (and now his heirs') identity.

Beves requires men to overthrow his mother and stepfather (Devoun), and it just so happens, as romance goes, that Beves ends up in Cologne where his uncle Saber Florentin will provide him with such men (2561). Beves uses deceit to overthrow his stepfather, pretending to be French rather than openly defeating his stepfather and his troops. This act troubles Beves's natural right to Hamtoun. Beves should have entered Hamtoun and rallied the lords to support his cause, but this move suggests that they may not have recognized their rightful lord because of his long absence. After returning from defeating a dragon in the tradition of the legend of St. George (2597-910), Beves inquires after his stepfather who occupies his land of Hamtoun, and Saber Florentin informs Beves that his other uncle Saber has been waging ongoing battle with Devoun. Saber Florentin then advises Beves to return to England to help his uncle and provides Beves with a hundred men (2912-26). Upon arriving in England, Beves devises a plan to conceal his and his knights' identity and to trick Devoun at the same time:

"Lordinges," to his men a sede,

"Ze scholle do be mine rede!

Haue ich eni so hardi on,

Pat dorre to Hamtoun gon,

To þemperur of Almaine,

And sai: her comeþ a vintaine,

Al prest an hondred knigt,

Pat fore his loue wilen figte

Boþe wiþ spere & wiþ launce,
Al fresch icome out of Fraunce!
Ac euer, an earnest & a rage,
Euer spekeþ frensche laungage,
And sai, ich hatte Gerard,
And figte ich wile be forward,
And of þe meistri icham sure,
Ȝif he wile ȝilde min hure?" (2957-72)

Beves uses guile to gain entrance into Hamtoun in this way, yet the lengths of such guile trouble an already fraught English identity for him. Instead of openly attacking his stepfather's land, Beves chooses to conceal himself as a Frenchman named Gerard offering assistance to Devoun in his ongoing battle against Beves's uncle Saber. On one hand, Beves demonstrates the self-will that he so sorely lacked earlier in the poem, yet his deceit goes so far as to harm Englishmen in an effort to undo Devoun. The fact that Beves does not rally those who would owe him fealty and instead uses deception directly contradicts the narratorial frame of the poem. If Beves truly were of Hamtoun, then, naturally, the knights of Hamtoun would have recognized him and joined him against Devoun, the usurper. Instead, Beves develops this elaborate scheme to trick Devoun rather than to beat him on the battlefield. Beves convinces Devoun to arm his knights and to provide Beves with a hundred of his own knights to go to Wight to defeat Saber (3007-22). Once on the water, Beves orders his men to throw Devoun's men overboard into the ford, killing them all (3029-32). As a result, Beves successfully unites his forces with Saber's to later battle Devoun's forces, but he kills a hundred knights by guile in the act.

The narrative claims these are the emperor's knights, and so one could assume that they are not men of Hamtoun, but their identities remain unclear. The disguise that Beves uses as a Frenchman speaks to the instability of the English identity in which the narratorial frame casts Beves. Beves readily fools Devoun into believing he is French in the same way that he assimilated into Saracen culture, which indicates that his Englishness is not outwardly evident. Or, if identity is so simply performed, it is unsettling that Beves never performs his Englishness to the extent that the narrative claims.

Beves retakes Hamtoun with the aid of his uncle Saber as well as the Saracen giant, Ascopard. After defeating his stepfather's forces, Beves is *made* the earl of Hamtoun. The necessity of being made rather than assuming this position of Hamtoun qualifies it as a position of power achieved through warfare rather than, as the narrative insists, a position of birth. The vengeance plot of the narrative rests solely on right, yet the context questions whether Beves succeeds through right or, as often found in warfare, through might. Ascopard plays a large role in defeating the emperor, demonstrating once again the Saracen ties Beves has. Beves instructs Ascopard to bring the emperor to his castle, which he accomplishes with ease (3421-24, 3435-40). Beves defeats his stepfather's men, exercising the vengeance for which he has long waited:

And þus sire Beues wan þe pris
And vengede him of is enemis,
And to þe castel þai wente isame
Wiþ gret solas, gle and game,
And þat his stifader wer ded,
Ase tit he let felle a led

Ful of pich and of bremston,
And hot led let falle þer on;
Whan hit alþer swiþer seþ,
Þemperur þar in a deþ;
Par a lay atenede:
Wende his saule, whider it wende! (3447-58)

There is no reference to God or to prayer at all during this episode as in the episodes during which Beves defeats Saracen foes; instead, Beves and his men seem giddy with blood-lust. Beves lacks here the Christian identity with which the narrative so often frames him, and this lack makes the reader wonder what these actions are supposed to reflect on Beves. That is, in a narrative that so often directs one's attention to a justification of one sort or another for its violence, such a scene without redirection - without framing - rings oddly. Such action is typical of the genre, but the lack of trumpeting Beves's Christian identity here demonstrates that it is not necessary – there is not a need to differentiate Beves's actions as Christian here because he is not at risk of being mistaken for a Saracen knight. Beves finally regains his lineal title, but even this action in the narrative seems hollow compared to the framed build-up to it:

Þanne al þe lordes of Hamteschire
Made Beues lord and sire
And dede him feute & omage,
Ase hit was law & riȝt vsage. (3467-70; my italics)

Beves gains the fealty of his lords, but this fealty is clearly predicated upon these same lords making Beves their lord. These words undermine the birthright to which the narrative so often returns in its framing of Beves.

Beves wins his earldom, but he does not stay in Hamtoun and begins a self-imposed exile that will last for the remainder of the narrative over the threat of losing his horse Arondel. This preference and choice of his horse over his country - what is, according to the narratorial frame of the poem, ostensibly his *home* - indicates Beves's estrangement from his birthplace, from England, and his attachment to his Saracen history. While in London, the prince notices Arondel during races and asks that Beves give Arondel to him as a gift, and of course Beves refuses (3543-48). This refusal alone could be read as a foreign over national preference, but the distinction is more clear when the prince attempts to mount the horse and Arondel "Wip his hint fot he him smot / And to-daschte al is brain" (3562-63). Killing the sole heir to the throne is, of course, treason, but rather than killing Beves, the king's barons suggest that Arondel be killed, to which Beves replies, "Ac min hors for to were / Ingelonde ich wil for-swere" (3577-78). Rather than give up his horse, Beves will leave England and leaves Hamtoun to Saber. He readily leaves the country that the narrative identifies continually as his home to save the life of his horse that was given to him by a Saracen, King Ermin. This action implies that Beves values one Saracen object over an entire country, let alone Hamtoun.

The final return of Beves into England is clearly motivated by what Crane has identified as "baronial rights," but the means by which Beves sacks London undo the facade of Englishness that the narratorial frame has constantly projected onto Beves and his actions. Beves and Terri bring a massive host with them into England of "Sexty

þosend told in tale" (4276), arriving in South Hamtoun to meet with Saber's son, Robaund. These men are foreigners, so essentially Beves leads an invasion into England to march against King Edgar if he does not acquiesce and recognize the right to Hamtoun that Saber and his heirs have. The king does so, but his evil steward refuses to stand for Beves, a traitor, to not face punishment. The steward calls men to arms under the false guise of the king's command (4331-38). This call brings Londoners to arms to face Beves, who they believe is a traitor as a result of the steward's lie. Unlike the episode in which Beves retakes Hamtoun, though, the narrative provides the Christian framing to justify the slaughter that Beves is about to commit. Rather than depicting this episode as an expatriated Englishman slaying Englishmen, the narrative would rather the reader focus on right versus wrong. This moment serves as the ultimate troubling of Beves's English identity, and the narratorial frame must redirect the reader's attention away from this tension to instead focus on the upright Christian knight, Beves, fighting against the evil steward and his misguided men. To further trouble any possibility of a remaining English identity for Beves, the reader need only look at the description of Beves's sons, Miles and Gii, who arrive to aid their father. Gii rides a "rabit," and Miles rides a "dromedary" (4475, 4481). Both of these animals - the Rabite, "an Arabian horse" ("† rabite, n.") and the dromedary, "a light and fleet breed of camel, specially reared and trained for riding" ("dromedary, n.") - are of Middle Eastern extraction, reflecting the cultural hybridity of Beves's sons and his own ties to Saracen land. Furthermore, these references serve to remind the reader that Beves's forces are themselves of foreign extraction; the English hero of the narrative lays waste to London, accumulating casualties of "To and þretti þosent" (4532), between the foreign host of Beves and

London citizens called to arms under false pretenses. The bloodshed is so great "Þat al Temse was blod red" (4530). In sum, notes Calkin, the results of this battle "cast Beves as a military menace to England and its inhabitants, and as a catalyst for civil war" ("The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange" 146). Beves wins the battle, but he simultaneously forever alienates himself from England.

No semblance of English identity should remain for Beves, but the narrative repurposes this foreign invasion as a lineal expansion by making Beves's son, Miles, King Edgar's heir, effectively inserting Beves's bloodline into that of English kings. Edgar seems to insinuate that Beves is the cause of trouble in the country:

"Ichave leued me lif
Longe wiþ outen werre & strif,
& now icham so falle in elde,
Þat i ne may min armes welde:
Twei sones Beues haþ wiþ him brougt,
Þar fore hit is in me þougt,
Miles, his sone, me dougter take,
In þis maner is pes to make." (4543-50)

Edgar's words portray Beves as a ruthless invader who uses force to accrue lands and titles rather than any sort of English knight or hero as the narratorial frame suggests. Instead of securing England, Beves destabilizes it, desolating its capital and killing the people who, ideally, an Englishman would protect. Finally, rather than remaining in England, Beves returns to his kingdom at Mombraunt. Despite making peace with Edgar and inserting his own bloodline into that of kings, "Beues tok leue, hom to wende"

(4570). As far as crafting the story of an English knight, this narrative's waning moments in England leave the reader unsettled, doubting that Beves is such a hero despite the poem's narratorial framing of him.

Conclusions: Cosmopolitan Beves

The narratorial frame of *The Romaunce of Sir Beves of Hamtoun* presents Beves as an English knight who accomplishes a number of feats to reflect positively back onto his and, implicitly, the country's identities. However, the actions that Beves takes throughout the poem problematize such a simple relationship. Beves, as I have shown, often finds himself abroad and fighting with foreign armies for foreign kings. Furthermore, when Beves finally returns to Hamtoun and to England, he brings not peace, but war. The narratorial frame sees Beves as a model of English heroism and attempts to have the reader see the same picture, but the actions, when examined against this framing device, show a different story altogether. This romance presents a knight who is quite cosmopolitan despite the frame's attempt to achieve the contrary. Even though this presentation does not show its reader a particularly English knight, it does indeed reflect the difficulty of projecting modern conceptions of nation back onto the texts and cultures of even the later Middle Ages in England. Or, perhaps this lack of evidence to support the nationality that *The Romaunce of Beves of Hamtoun* intends to present works regardless of evident actions (or a lack thereof). Returning to a quote from Petre-Turville, the writer of this romance has "to conceal, those instances where imaginative construction is at odds with reality" (14). The narratorial frame wants Beves to be English, and through the rhetorical moves such a frame presents, it may very well succeed.

If this narratorial frame might succeed, then, it must work to a different end – exacerbating difference to show sameness. Englishness, through such framing, becomes a mutable category that cannot be defined by borders and language alone. It becomes a way of acting rather than a place or origin. To be English, from this perspective, means to exercise the characteristics of Beves. Where Beves is does not matter, and such freeing of a national identity from both borders (and language even though the romance does not address this in particular) displays a type of nationalism that would reach its pinnacle centuries later. In referring to the Auchinleck manuscript of which *The Romaunce of Sir Beues of Hamtoun* is a part, Turville-Petre concludes, “It was all right to read romances in English. It is important, though, to recognize that the use of English does not simply answer a social need but is an expression of the very character of the manuscript, of its passion for England and its pride in being English. Its Englishness is much more than a matter of language” (138). If the narratorial frame of the poem indeed attempts to show that Englishness is a way of acting rather than an identity-otherwise-established, however, the narratorial tags and references that it uses problematize such a reading. Instead, as this chapter has argued, the narratorial frame of *The Romaunce of Sir Beues of Hamtoun* attempts to present Beves as the ideal English knight, but in so doing, it brings his Englishness into question. Beves may be a knight from England, but as this argument has demonstrated, he is not, as the frame would have, an English knight.

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